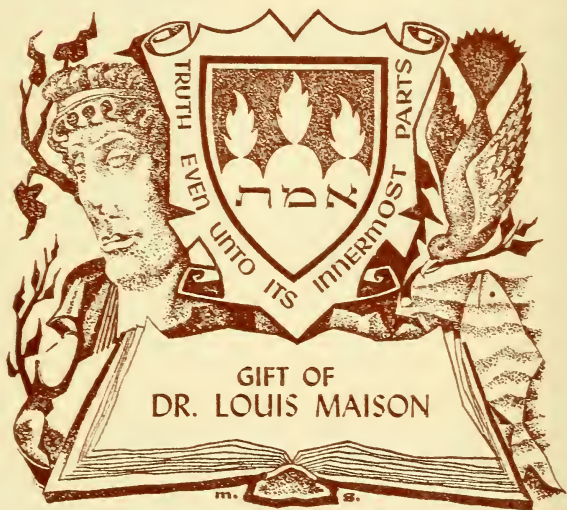




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JANE EYRE.



VOL. II.

JANE EYRE.

An Autobiography.

EDITED BY

CURRIER BELL.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LONDON:
SMITH, ELDER, AND CO., CORNHILL.

1847.

Rare

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1847

v. 2

London:
Printed by STEWART and MURRAY,
Old Bailey.

JANE EYRE.



CHAPTER I.

I BOTH wished and feared to see Mr. Rochester on the day which followed this sleepless night: I wanted to hear his voice again, yet feared to meet his eye. During the early part of the morning, I momentarily expected his coming: he was not in the frequent habit of entering the school-room; but he did step in for a few minutes sometimes, and I had the impression that he was sure to visit it that day.

But the morning passed just as usual: nothing happened to interrupt the quiet course of Adèle's studies; only, soon after breakfast, I heard some bustle in the neighbourhood of Mr. Rochester's chamber, Mrs. Fairfax's voice, and Leah's, and the cook's—that is, John's wife—and even John's own gruff tones. There were exclamations of “What a mercy master was not burnt in his bed!” “It is always

dangerous to keep a candle lit at night.” “How providential that he had presence of mind to think of the water-jug!” “I wonder he waked nobody!” “It is to be hoped he will not take cold with sleeping on the library sofa,” &c.

To much confabulation succeeded a sound of scrubbing and setting to rights; and when I passed the room, in going down stairs to dinner, I saw through the open door that all was again restored to complete order: only the bed was stripped of its hangings. Leah stood up in the window-seat, rubbing the panes of glass dimmed with smoke. I was about to address her; for I wished to know what account had been given of the affair: but, on advancing, I saw a second person in the chamber—a woman sitting on a chair by the bed-side, and sewing rings to new curtains. That woman was no other than Grace Poole.

There she sat, staid and taciturn-looking, as usual; in her brown stuff gown, her check apron, white handkerchief, and cap. She was intent on her work, in which her whole thoughts seemed absorbed: on her hard forehead, and in her common-place features, was nothing either of the paleness or desperation one would have expected to see marking the

countenance of a woman who had attempted murder; and whose intended victim had followed her last night to her lair, and (as I believed) charged her with the crime she wished to perpetrate. I was amazed—confounded. She looked up while I still gazed at her: no start, no increase or failure of colour betrayed emotion, consciousness of guilt, or fear of detection. She said, “Good morning, Miss,” in her usual phlegmatic and brief manner; and taking up another ring and more tape, went on with her sewing.

“I will put her to some test,” thought I: “such absolute impenetrability is past comprehension.”

“Good morning, Grace,” I said. “Has anything happened here? I thought I heard the servants all talking together a while ago.”

“Only master had been reading in his bed last night; he fell asleep with his candle lit, and the curtains got on fire: but, fortunately, he awoke before the bed-clothes or the wood-work caught, and contrived to quench the flame with the water in the ewer.”

“A strange affair!” I said, in a low voice: then, looking at her fixedly,—“Did Mr. Rochester wake nobody? Did no one hear him move?”

She again raised her eyes to me; and this time there was something of consciousness in their expression. She seemed to examine me warily; then she answered,—

“The servants sleep so far off, you know, Miss, they would not be likely to hear. Mrs. Fairfax’s room and yours are the nearest to master’s; but Mrs. Fairfax said she heard nothing: when people get elderly, they often sleep heavy.” She paused, and then added, with a sort of assumed indifference, but still in a marked and significant tone, “But you are young, Miss; and I should say a light sleeper: perhaps you may have heard a noise?”

“I did,” said I, dropping my voice, so that Leah, who was still polishing the panes, could not hear me, “and at first I thought it was Pilot: but Pilot cannot laugh; and I am certain I heard a laugh, and a strange one.”

She took a new needleful of thread, waxed it carefully, threaded her needle with a steady hand, and then observed, with perfect composure,—

“It is hardly likely master would laugh, I should think, Miss, when he was in such danger: you must have been dreaming.”

“I was not dreaming,” I said, with some warmth: for her brazen coolness provoked me.

Again she looked at me; and with the same scrutinizing and conscious eye.

“Have you told master that you heard a laugh?” she inquired.

“I have not had the opportunity of speaking to him this morning.”

“You did not think of opening your door and looking out into the gallery?” she further asked.

She appeared to be cross-questioning me; attempting to draw from me information unawares: the idea struck me that if she discovered I knew or suspected her guilt, she would be playing off some of her malignant pranks on me; I thought it advisable to be on my guard.

“On the contrary,” said I, “I bolted my door.”

“Then you are not in the habit of bolting your door every night before you get into bed?”

“Fiend! she wants to know my habits that she may lay her plans accordingly!” Indignation again prevailed over prudence; I replied sharply: “Hitherto I have often omitted to fasten the bolt: I did not think it necessary. I was not aware any danger or annoyance was to be dreaded at Thornfield-

Hall: but in future (and I laid marked stress on the words) I shall take good care to make all secure before I venture to lie down."

"It will be wise so to do;" was her answer: "this neighbourhood is as quiet as any I know, and I never heard of the hall being attempted by robbers since it was a house; though there are hundreds of pounds' worth of plate in the plate-closet, as is well known. And you see, for such a large house there are very few servants, because master has never lived here much; and when he does come, being a bachelor, he needs little waiting on: but I always think it best to err on the safe side; a door is soon fastened, and it is as well to have a drawn bolt between one and any mischief that may be about. A deal of people, Miss, are for trusting all to Providence; but I say Providence will not dispense with the means, though he often blesses them when they are used discreetly." And here she closed her harangue: a long one for her, and uttered with the demureness of a Quakeress.

I still stood absolutely dumbfounded at what appeared to me her miraculous self-possession and most inscrutable hypocrisy; when the cook entered.

"Mrs. Poole," said she, "addressing Grace,

“the servants’ dinner will soon be ready: will you come down?”

“No; just put my pint of porter and bit of pudding on a tray, and I’ll carry it up-stairs.”

“You’ll have some meat?”

“Just a morsel, and a taste of cheese, that’s all.”

“And the sago?”

“Never mind it, at present: I shall be coming down before tea-time: I’ll make it myself.”

The cook here turned to me, saying that Mrs. Fairfax was waiting for me; so I departed.

I hardly heard Mrs. Fairfax’s account of the curtain conflagration during dinner, so much was I occupied in puzzling my brains over the enigmatical character of Grace Poole; and still more in pondering the problem of her position at Thornfield: in questioning why she had not been given into custody that morning; or at the very least dismissed from her master’s service. He had almost as much as declared his conviction of her criminality last night: what mysterious cause withheld him from accusing her? Why had he enjoined me too to secrecy? It was strange: a bold, vindictive and haughty gentleman seemed somehow in the power of

one of the meanest of his dependents; so much in her power, that even when she lifted her hand against his life, he dared not openly charge her with the attempt, much less punish her for it.

Had Grace been young and handsome, I should have been tempted to think that tenderer feelings than prudence or fear influenced Mr. Rochester in her behalf; but hard-favoured and matronly as she was, the idea could not be admitted. "Yet," I reflected, "she has been young once; her youth would be contemporary with her master's: Mrs. Fairfax told me once, she had lived here many years. I don't think she can ever have been pretty; but for aught I know she may possess originality and strength of character to compensate for the want of personal advantages. Mr. Rochester is an amateur of the decided and eccentric: Grace is eccentric at least. What if a former caprice (a freak very possible to a nature so sudden and headstrong as his) has delivered him into her power, and she now exercises over his actions a secret influence, the result of his own indiscretion, which he cannot shake off and dare not disregard?" But, having reached this point of conjecture, Mrs. Poole's square, flat figure, and uncomely,

dry, even coarse face, recurred so distinctly to my mind's eye, that I thought "No; impossible! my supposition cannot be correct. Yet," suggested the secret voice which talks to us in our own hearts, "*you* are not beautiful either, and perhaps Mr. Rochester approves you: at any rate you have often felt as if he did; and last night—remember his words; remember his look; remember his voice!"

I well remembered all: language, glance and tone seemed at the moment vividly renewed. I was now in the school-room; Adèle was drawing; I bent over her and directed her pencil. She looked up with a sort of start.

"Qu'avez-vous, Mademoiselle?" said she; "Vos doigts tremblent comme la feuille, et vos joues sont rouges: mais, rouges comme des cerises!"

"I am hot, Adèle, with stooping!" She went on sketching, I went on thinking.

I hastened to drive from my mind the hateful notion I had been conceiving respecting Grace Poole: it disgusted me. I compared myself with her, and found we were different. Bessie Leaven had said I was quite a lady; and she spoke truth: I was a lady. And now I looked much better than I did when Bessie saw me: I had more colour and more flesh;

more life, more vivacity; because I had brighter hopes and keener enjoyments.

“Evening approaches,” said I, as I looked towards the window. “I have never heard Mr. Rochester’s voice or step in the house to-day; but surely I shall see him before night: I feared the meeting in the morning; now I desire it, because expectation has been so long baffled that it is grown impatient.”

When dusk actually closed, and when Adèle left me to go and play in the nursery with Sophie, I did most keenly desire it. I listened for the bell to ring below; I listened for Leah coming up with a message; I fancied sometimes I heard Mr. Rochester’s own tread, and I turned to the door, expecting it to open and admit him. The door remained shut: darkness only came in through the window. Still it was not late: he often sent for me at seven and eight o’clock, and it was yet but six. Surely I should not be wholly disappointed to-night, when I had so many things to say to him! I wanted again to introduce the subject of Grace Poole, and to hear what he would answer; I wanted to ask him plainly if he really believed it was she who had made last night’s hideous attempt; and if so, why he kept her wickedness a secret. It little mattered

whether my curiosity irritated him ; I knew the pleasure of vexing and soothing him by turns ; it was one I chiefly delighted in, and a sure instinct always prevented me from going too far : beyond the verge of provocation I never ventured ; on the extreme brink I liked well to try my skill. Retaining every minute form of respect, every propriety of my station, I could still meet him in argument without fear or uneasy restraint ; this suited both him and me.

A tread creaked on the stairs at last ; Leah made her appearance : but it was only to intimate that tea was ready in Mrs. Fairfax's room. Thither I repaired, glad at least to go down stairs ; for that brought me, I imagined, nearer to Mr. Rochester's presence.

"You must want your tea," said the good lady as I joined her ; "you ate so little at dinner. I am afraid," she continued, "you are not well to-day : you look flushed and feverish."

"Oh, quite well ! I never felt better."

"Then you must prove it by evincing a good appetite ; will you fill the tea-pot while I knit off this needle ?" Having completed her task, she rose to draw down the blind which she had hitherto kept up ; by way, I

suppose, of making the most of daylight: though dusk was now fast deepening into total obscurity.

“It is fair to-night,” said she, as she looked through the panes, “though not starlight: Mr. Rochester has, on the whole, had a favourable day for his journey.”

“Journey!—Is Mr. Rochester gone anywhere? I did not know he was out.”

“Oh, he set off the moment he had breakfasted! He is gone to the Leas; Mr. Esh-ton’s place, ten miles on the other side Mill-cote: I believe there is quite a party assembled there; Lord Ingram, Sir George Lynn, Colonel Dent and others.”

“Do you expect him back to-night?”

“No—nor to-morrow either; I should think he is very likely to stay a week or more: when these fine, fashionable people get together, they are so surrounded by elegance and gaiety; so well provided with all that can please and entertain, they are in no hurry to separate. Gentlemen, especially, are often in request on such occasions; and Mr. Rochester is so talented and so lively in society, that I believe he is a general favourite: the ladies are very fond of him; though you would not think his appearance calculated to recommend

him particularly in their eyes: but I suppose his acquirements and abilities, perhaps his wealth and good blood, make amends for any little fault of look."

"Are there ladies at the Leas?"

"There are Mrs. Eshton and her three daughters—very elegant young ladies indeed; and there are the honourable Blanche and Mary Ingram; most beautiful women, I suppose: indeed I have seen Blanche, six or seven years, since when she was a girl of eighteen. She came here to a Christmas ball and party Mr. Rochester gave. You should have seen the dining-room that day—how richly it was decorated, how brilliantly lit up! I should think there were fifty ladies and gentlemen present—all of the first county-families; and Miss Ingram was considered the belle of the evening."

"You saw her, you say, Mrs. Fairfax: what was she like?"

"Yes, I saw her. The dining-room doors were thrown open; and, as it was Christmas-time, the servants were allowed to assemble in the hall, to hear some of the ladies sing and play. Mr. Rochester would have me to come in, and I sat down in a quiet corner and watched them. I never saw a more splendid

scene : the ladies were magnificently dressed ; most of them—at least most of the younger ones—looked handsome ; but Miss Ingram was certainly the queen.”

“ And what was she like ? ”

“ Tall, fine bust, sloping shoulders ; long, graceful neck ; olive complexion, dark and clear ; noble features ; eyes rather like Mr. Rochester’s : large and black, and as brilliant as her jewels. And then she had such a fine head of hair ; raven-black, and so becomingly arranged : a crown of thick plaits behind, and in front the longest, the glossiest curls I ever saw. She was dressed in pure white ; an amber-coloured scarf was passed over her shoulder and across her breast, tied at the side, and descending in long, fringed ends below her knee. She wore an amber-coloured flower, too, in her hair : it contrasted well with the jetty mass of her curls.”

“ She was greatly admired, of course ? ”

“ Yes, indeed : and not only for her beauty, but for her accomplishments. She was one of the ladies who sang : a gentleman accompanied her on the piano. She and Mr. Rochester sung a duet.”

“ Mr. Rochester ! I was not aware he could sing.”

“Oh! he has a fine bass voice, and an excellent taste for music.”

“And Miss Ingram: what sort of a voice had she?”

“A very rich and powerful one: she sang delightfully; it was a treat to listen to her;—and she played afterwards. I am no judge of music, but Mr. Rochester is; and I heard him say her execution was remarkably good.”

“And this beautiful and accomplished lady is not yet married?”

“It appears not: I fancy neither she nor her sister have very large fortunes. Old Lord Ingram’s estates were chiefly entailed, and the eldest son came in for everything almost.”

“But I wonder no wealthy nobleman or gentleman has taken a fancy to her: Mr. Rochester, for instance. He is rich, is he not?”

“Oh! yes. But, you see, there is a considerable difference in age: Mr. Rochester is near forty; she is but twenty-five.”

“What of that? More unequal matches are made every day.”

“True: yet I should scarcely fancy Mr. Rochester would entertain an idea of the sort.—But you eat nothing: you have scarcely tasted since you began tea.”

“No: I am too thirsty to eat. Will you let me have another cup?”

I was about again to revert to the probability of a union between Mr. Rochester and the beautiful Blanche: but Adèle came in, and the conversation was turned into another channel.

When once more alone, I reviewed the information I had got; looked into my heart, examined its thoughts and feelings, and endeavoured to bring back with a strict hand such as had been straying through imagination's boundless and trackless waste, into the safe fold of common sense.

Arraigned at my own bar, Memory having given her evidence of the hopes, wishes, sentiments I had been cherishing since last night—of the general state of mind in which I had indulged for nearly a fortnight past; Reason having come forward and told, in her own quiet way, a plain, unvarnished tale, showing how I had rejected the real and rabidly devoured the ideal;—I pronounced judgment to this effect:—

That a greater fool than Jane Eyre had never breathed the breath of life: that a more fantastic idiot had never surfeited herself on sweet lies, and swallowed poison as if it were nectar.

“*You*,” I said, “a favourite with Mr. Rochester? *You* gifted with the power of pleasing him? *You* of importance to him in any way? Go! your folly sickens me. And you have derived pleasure from occasional tokens of preference—equivocal tokens, shown by a gentleman of family, and a man of the world, to a dependent and a novice. How dared you? Poor stupid dupe!—Could not even self-interest make you wiser? You repeated to yourself this morning the brief scene of last night?—Cover your face and be ashamed! He said something in praise of your eyes, did he? Blind puppy! Open their bleared lids and look on your own accursed senselessness! It does good to no woman to be flattered by her superior, who cannot possibly intend to marry her; and it is madness in all women to let a secret love kindle within them, which, if unreturned and unknown, must devour the life that feeds it; and, if discovered and responded to, must lead, *ignis fatuus*-like, into miry wilds whence there is no extrication.

“Listen, then, Jane Eyre, to your sentence: to-morrow, place the glass before you, and draw in chalk your own picture, faithfully; without softening one defect: omit no harsh

line, smooth away no displeasing irregularity ; write under it, ‘ Portrait of a Governess, disconnected, poor, and plain.’

“ Afterwards, take a piece of smooth ivory—you have one prepared in your drawing-box : take your palette, mix your freshest, finest, clearest tints ; choose your most delicate camel-hair pencils ; delineate carefully the loveliest face you can imagine ; paint it in your softest shades and sweetest hues, according to the description given by Mrs. Fairfax of Blanche Ingram : remember the raven ringlets, the oriental eye ;—what ! you revert to Mr. Rochester’s as a model ! Order ! No snivel !—no sentiment !—no regret ! I will endure only sense and resolution. Recall the august yet harmonious lineaments, the Grecian neck and bust : let the round and dazzling arm be visible, and the delicate hand ; omit neither diamond ring nor gold bracelet ; portray faithfully the attire, ærial lace and glistening satin, graceful scarf and golden rose : call it ‘ Blanche, an accomplished lady of rank.’

“ Whenever, in future, you should chance to fancy Mr. Rochester thinks well of you, take out these two pictures and compare them : say, ‘ Mr. Rochester might probably

win that noble lady's love, if he chose to strive for it; is it likely he would waste a serious thought on this indigent and insignificant plebeian?"

"I'll do it," I resolved: and having framed this determination, I grew calm, and fell asleep.

I kept my word. An hour or two sufficed to sketch my own portrait in crayons; and in less than a fortnight I had completed an ivory miniature of an imaginary Blanche Ingram. It looked a lovely face enough, and when compared with the real head in chalk, the contrast was as great as self-control could desire. I derived benefit from the task: it had kept my head and hands employed, and had given force and fixedness to the new impressions I wished to stamp indelibly on my heart.

Ere long I had reason to congratulate myself on the course of wholesome discipline to which I had thus forced my feelings to submit: thanks to it, I was able to meet subsequent occurrences with a decent calm; which, had they found me unprepared, I should probably have been unequal to maintain even externally.

CHAPTER II.

A WEEK passed, and no news arrived of Mr. Rochester: ten days; and still he did not come. Mrs. Fairfax said she should not be surprised if he were to go straight from the Leas to London, and thence to the continent, and not show his face again at Thornfield for a year to come: he had not unfrequently quitted it in a manner quite as abrupt and unexpected. When I heard this I was beginning to feel a strange chill and failing at the heart. I was actually permitting myself to experience a sickening sense of disappointment: but rallying my wits, and recollecting my principles, I at once called my sensations to order; and it was wonderful how I got over the temporary blunder—how I cleared up the mistake of supposing Mr. Rochester's movements a matter in which I had any cause to take a vital interest. Not that I humbled

myself by a slavish notion of inferiority: on the contrary, I just said:—

“You have nothing to do with the master of Thornfield, further than to receive the salary he gives you for teaching his protégée, and to be grateful for such respectful and kind treatment as, if you do your duty, you have a right to expect at his hands. Be sure that is the only tie he seriously acknowledges between you and him: so don't make him the object of your fine feelings, your raptures, agonies, and so forth. He is not of your order: keep to your caste; and be too self-respecting to lavish the love of the whole heart, soul, and strength, where such a gift is not wanted and would be despised.”

I went on with my day's business tranquilly; but ever and anon, vague suggestions kept wandering across my brain of reasons why I should quit Thornfield; and I kept involuntarily framing advertisements and pondering conjectures about new situations: these thoughts I did not think it necessary to check; they might germinate and bear fruit if they could.

Mr. Rochester had been absent upwards of a fortnight, when the post brought Mrs. Fairfax a letter.

“It is from the master,” said she, as she

looked at the direction. "Now I suppose we shall know whether we are to expect his return or not."

And while she broke the seal and perused the document, I went on taking my coffee: (we were at breakfast) it was hot, and I attributed to that circumstance a fiery glow which suddenly rose to my face. Why my hand shook, and why I involuntarily spilt half the contents of my cup into my saucer, I did not choose to consider.

"Well—I sometimes think we are too quiet; but we run a chance of being busy enough now: for a little while at least," said Mrs. Fairfax, still holding the note before her spectacles.

Ere I permitted myself to request an explanation, I tied the string of Adèle's pinafore which happened to be loose: having helped her also to another bun and refilled her mug with milk, I said nonchalantly:—

"Mr. Rochester is not likely to return soon, I suppose?"

"Indeed, he is—in three days, he says; that will be next Thursday; and not alone either. I don't know how many of the fine people at the Leas are coming with him: he sends directions for all the best bed-rooms to be

prepared; and the library and drawing-rooms are to be cleaned out; and I am to get more kitchen hands from the George Inn, at Millcote, and from wherever else I can; and the ladies will bring their maids and the gentlemen their valets: so we shall have a full house of it." And Mrs. Fairfax swallowed her breakfast and hastened away to commence operations.

The three days were, as she had foretold, busy enough. I had thought all the rooms at Thornfield beautifully clean and well-arranged: but it appears I was mistaken. Three women were got to help; and such scrubbing, such brushing, such washing of paint and beating of carpets, such taking down and putting up of pictures, such polishing of mirrors and lustres, such lighting of fires in bedrooms, such airing of sheets and feather-beds on hearths, I never beheld, either before or since. Adèle ran quite wild in the midst of it: the preparations for company and the prospect of their arrival, seemed to throw her into ecstasies. She would have Sophie to look over all her "toilettes" as she called frocks; to furbish up any that were "passées," and to air and arrange the new. For herself, she did nothing but caper about in the front chambers,

jump on and off the bedsteads, and lie on the mattresses and piled-up bolsters and pillows before the enormous fires roaring in the chimneys. From school duties she was exonerated: Mrs. Fairfax had pressed me into her service, and I was all day in the store-room, helping (or hindering) her and the cook; learning to make custards and cheesecakes and French pastry, to truss game and garnish dessert-dishes.

The party were expected to arrive on Thursday afternoon, in time for dinner at six. During the intervening period I had no time to nurse chimeras; and I believe I was as active and gay as anybody—Adèle excepted. Still, now and then, I received a damping check to my cheerfulness; and was, in spite of myself, thrown back on the region of doubts and portents, and dark conjectures. This was when I chanced to see the third story staircase door (which of late had always been kept locked) open slowly, and give passage to the form of Grace Poole, in prim cap, white apron, and handkerchief: when I watched her glide along the gallery, her quiet tread muffled in a list slipper; when I saw her look into the bustling, topsy-turvy bed-rooms,—just say a word, perhaps, to the charwomen about the

proper way to polish a grate, or clean a marble mantelpiece, or take stains from papered walls, and then pass on. She would thus descend to the kitchen once a day, eat her dinner, smoke a moderate pipe on the hearth, and go back, carrying her pot of porter with her, for her private solace, in her own gloomy upper haunt. Only one hour in the twenty-four did she pass with her fellow-servants below; all the rest of her time was spent in some low-ceiled, oaken chamber of the second story: there she sat and sewed—and probably laughed drearily to herself,—as companionless as a prisoner in his dungeon.

The strangest thing of all was, that not a soul in the house, except me, noticed her habits, or seemed to marvel at them: no one discussed her position or employment; no one pitied her solitude or isolation. I once, indeed, overheard part of a dialogue between Leah and one of the charwomen, of which Grace formed the subject. Leah had been saying something I had not caught, and the charwoman remarked:—

“She gets good wages, I guess?”

“Yes,” said Leah; “I wish I had as good: not that mine are to complain of,—there’s no stinginess at Thornfield; but they’re not one-

fifth of the sum Mrs. Poole receives. And she is laying by: she goes every quarter to the bank at Millcote. I should not wonder but she has saved enough to keep her independent if she liked to leave; but I suppose she's got used to the place: and then she's not forty yet, and strong and able for anything. It is too soon for her to give up business."

"She is a good hand, I daresay," said the charwoman.

"Ah!—she understands what she has to do,—nobody better," rejoined Leah, significantly; "and it is not every one could fill her shoes: not for all the money she gets."

"That it is not!" was the reply. "I wonder whether master——"

The charwoman was going on; but here Leah turned and perceived me, and she instantly gave her companion a nudge.

"Doesn't she know?" I heard the woman whisper.

Leah shook her head, and the conversation was of course dropped. All I had gathered from it amounted to this,—that there was a mystery at Thornfield; and that from participation in that mystery, I was purposely excluded.

Thursday came: all work had been completed the previous evening; carpets were laid

down, bed-hangings festooned, radiant white counterpanes spread, toilet tables arranged, furniture rubbed, flowers piled in vases: both chambers and saloons looked as fresh and bright as hands could make them. The hall, too, was scoured; and the great carved clock, as well as the steps and bannisters of the staircase, were polished to the brightness of glass: in the dining-room, the sideboard flashed resplendent with plate; in the drawing-room and boudoir, vases of exotics bloomed on all sides.

Afternoon arrived: Mrs. Fairfax assumed her best black satin gown, her gloves, and her gold watch; for it was her part to receive the company,—to conduct the ladies to their rooms, &c. Adèle, too, would be dressed; though I thought she had little chance of being introduced to the party, that day at least. However, to please her, I allowed Sophie to apparel her in one of her short, full muslin frocks. For myself, I had no need to make any change; I should not be called upon to quit my sanctum of the school-room: for a sanctum it was now become to me,—“a very pleasant refuge in time of trouble.”

It had been a mild, serene spring day: one of those days which towards the end of March or the beginning of April, rise shining over

the earth as heralds of summer. It was drawing to an end now; but the evening was even warm, and I sat at work in the school-room with the window open.

“It gets late;” said Mrs. Fairfax, entering in rustling state. “I am glad I ordered dinner an hour after the time Mr. Rochester mentioned; for it is past six now. I have sent John down to the gates to see if there is anything on the road: one can see a long way from thence in the direction of Millcote.” She went to the window. “Here he is!” said she. “Well, John,” (leaning out) “any news?”

“They’re coming, ma’am,” was the answer. “They’ll be here in ten minutes.”

Adèle flew to the window. I followed; taking care to stand on one side, so that, screened by the curtain, I could see without being seen.

The ten minutes John had given seemed very long, but at last wheels were heard; four equestrians galloped up the drive, and after them came two open carriages. Fluttering veils and waving plumes filled the vehicles; two of the cavaliers were young, dashing looking gentlemen; the third was Mr. Rochester on his black horse, Mesrour; Pilot bounding before him: at his side rode a lady, and he and she were the first of the party. Her purple

riding-habit almost swept the ground, her veil streamed long on the breeze; mingling with its transparent folds, and gleaming through them, shone rich raven ringlets.

“Miss Ingram!” exclaimed Mrs. Fairfax, and away she hurried to her post below.

The cavalcade, following the sweep of the drive, quickly turned the angle of the house, and I lost sight of it. Adèle now petitioned to go down; but I took her on my knee and gave her to understand that she must not on any account think of venturing in sight of the ladies, either now or at any other time, unless expressly sent for: that Mr. Rochester would be very angry, &c. “Some natural tears she shed” on being told this; but as I began to look very grave, she consented at last to wipe them.

A joyous stir was now audible in the hall: gentlemen’s deep tones, and ladies’ silvery accents blent harmoniously together, and distinguishable above all, though not loud, was the sonorous voice of the master of Thornfield Hall, welcoming his fair and gallant guests under its roof. Then light steps ascended the stairs; and there was a tripping through the gallery, and soft, cheerful laughs, and opening and closing doors, and, for a time, a hush.

“Elles changent de toilettes,” said Adèle; who, listening attentively, had followed every movement; and she sighed.

“Chez maman,” said she, “quand il y avait du monde, je les suivais partout, au salon et à leurs chambres; souvent je regardais les femmes de chambre coiffer et habiller les dames, et c’était si amusant: comme cela on apprend.”

“Don’t you feel hungry, Adèle?”

“Mais oui, mademoiselle: voilà cinq ou six heures que nous n’avons pas mangé.”

“Well now, while the ladies are in their rooms, I will venture down and get you something to eat.”

And issuing from my asylum with precaution, I sought a back-stairs which conducted directly to the kitchen. All in that region was fire and commotion; the soup and fish were in the last stage of projection, and the cook hung over her crucibles in a frame of mind and body threatening spontaneous combustion. In the servants’ hall two coachmen and three gentlemen’s gentlemen stood or sat round the fire; the Abigails I suppose were up-stairs with their mistresses: the new servants that had been hired from Millcote, were bustling about everywhere. Threading this chaos, I at last reached the larder; there I

took possession of a cold chicken, a roll of bread, some tarts, a plate or two and a knife and fork: with this booty I made a hasty retreat. I had regained the gallery, and was just shutting the back-door behind me, when an accelerated hum warned me that the ladies were about to issue from their chambers. I could not proceed to the school-room without passing some of their doors, and running the risk of being surprised with my cargo of victuallage; so I stood still at this end, which, being windowless, was dark: quite dark now, for the sun was set and twilight gathering.

Presently the chambers gave up their fair tenants one after another: each came out gaily and airily, with dress that gleamed lustrous through the dusk. For a moment they stood grouped together at the other extremity of the gallery, conversing in a key of sweet subdued vivacity: they then descended the staircase, almost as noiselessly as a bright mist rolls down a hill. Their collective appearance had left on me an impression of high-born elegance, such as I had never before received.

I found Adèle peeping through the school-room door, which she held ajar. "What beautiful ladies!" cried she in English. "Oh I wish I might go to them! Do you think Mr.

Rochester will send for us by-and-by, after dinner?"

"No, indeed, I don't; Mr. Rochester has something else to think about. Never mind the ladies to-night; perhaps you will see them to-morrow: here is your dinner."

She was really hungry, so the chicken and tarts served to divert her attention for a time. It was well I secured this forage; or both she, I and Sophie, to whom I conveyed a share of our repast, would have run a chance of getting no dinner at all: every one down stairs was too much engaged to think of us. The dessert was not carried out till after nine, and at ten, footmen were still running to and fro with trays and coffee-cups. I allowed Adèle to sit up much later than usual; for she declared she could not possibly go to sleep while the doors kept opening and shutting below, and people bustling about. Besides, she added, a message might possibly come from Mr. Rochester when she was undressed; "*et alors quel dommage!*"

I told her stories as long as she would listen to them; and then for a change, I took her out into the gallery. The hall lamp was now lit, and it amused her to look over the balustrade and watch the servants passing backwards and

forwards. When the evening was far advanced, a sound of music issued from the drawing-room, whither the piano had been removed; Adèle and I sat down on the top step of the stairs to listen. Presently a voice blent with the rich tones of the instrument: it was a lady who sang, and very sweet her notes were. The solo over, a duet followed, and then a glee: a joyous conversational murmur filled up the intervals. I listened long: suddenly I discovered that my ear was wholly intent on analyzing the mingled sounds, and trying to discriminate amidst the confusion of accents those of Mr. Rochester; and when it caught them, which it soon did, it found a further task in framing the tones, rendered by distance inarticulate, into words.

The clock struck eleven. I looked at Adèle, whose head leant against my shoulder; her eyes were waxing heavy, so I took her up in my arms and carried her off to bed. It was near one before the gentlemen and ladies sought their chambers.

The next day was as fine as its predecessor; it was devoted by the party to an excursion to some site in the neighbourhood. They set out early in the forenoon, some on horseback, the rest in carriages; I witnessed both the depar-

ture and the return. Miss Ingram, as before, was the only lady equestrian; and as before, Mr. Rochester galloped at her side: the two rode a little apart from the rest. I pointed out this circumstance to Mrs. Fairfax, who was standing at the window with me:—

“You said it was not likely they should think of being married,” said I, “but you see Mr. Rochester evidently prefers her to any of the other ladies.”

“Yes; I daresay: no doubt he admires her.”

“And she him,” I added; “look how she leans her head towards him as if she were conversing confidentially! I wish I could see her face: I have never had a glimpse of it yet.”

“You will see her this evening;” answered Mrs. Fairfax. “I happened to remark to Mr. Rochester how much Adèle wished to be introduced to the ladies, and he said: ‘Oh! let her come into the drawing-room after dinner; and request Miss Eyre to accompany her.’”

“Yes—he said that from mere politeness: I need not go, I am sure,” I answered.

“Well—I observed to him that as you were unused to company, I did not think you

would like appearing before so gay a party—all strangers; and he replied, in his quick way: ‘Nonsense! If she objects, tell her it is my particular wish; and if she resists, say I shall come and fetch her in case of contumacy.’”

“I will not give him that trouble;” I answered. “I will go, if no better may be: but I don’t like it. Shall you be there, Mrs. Fairfax?”

“No; I pleaded off, and he admitted my plea. I’ll tell you how to manage so as to avoid the embarrassment of making a formal entrance, which is the most disagreeable part of the business. You must go into the drawing-room while it is empty, before the ladies leave the dinner-table; choose your seat in any quiet nook you like; you need not stay long after the gentlemen come in, unless you please: just let Mr. Rochester see you are there and then slip away—nobody will notice you.”

“Will these people remain long, do you think?”

“Perhaps two or three weeks; certainly not more. After the Easter recess, Sir George Lynn, who was lately elected member for Millcote, will have to go up to town and take his seat; I dare say Mr. Rochester will accompany him: it surprises me that he has

already made so protracted a stay at Thornfield.

It was with some trepidation that I perceived the hour approach when I was to repair with my charge to the drawing-room. Adèle had been in a state of ecstasy all day, after hearing she was to be presented to the ladies in the evening ; and it was not till Sophie commenced the operation of dressing her, that she sobered down. Then the importance of the process quickly steadied her ; and by the time she had her curls arranged in well-smoothed, drooping clusters, her pink satin frock put on, her long sash tied, and her lace mittens adjusted, she looked as grave as any judge. No need to warn her not to disarrange her attire : when she was dressed, she sat demurely down in her little chair, taking care previously to lift up the satin skirt for fear she should crease it, and assured me she would not stir thence till I was ready. This I quickly was : my best dress (the silver-grey one, purchased for Miss Temple's wedding and never worn since) was soon put on ; my hair was soon smoothed ; my sole ornament, the pearl brooch, soon assumed. We descended.

Fortunately there was another entrance to the drawing-room than that through the saloon

where they were all seated at dinner. We found the apartment vacant; a large fire burning silently on the marble hearth, and wax candles shining in bright solitude, amid the exquisite flowers with which the tables were adorned. The crimson curtain hung before the arch: slight as was the separation this drapery formed from the party in the adjoining saloon, they spoke in so low a key that nothing of their conversation could be distinguished beyond a soothing murmur.

Adèle, who appeared to be still under the influence of a most solemnizing impression, sat down without a word on the footstool I pointed out to her. I retired to a window seat, and taking a book from a table near, endeavoured to read. Adèle brought her stool to my feet; ere long she touched my knee.

“What is it, Adèle?”

“Est-ce que je ne puis pas prendre une seule de ces fleurs magnifiques, Mademoiselle? Seulement pour compléter ma toilette.”

“You think too much of your ‘toilette,’ Adèle: but you may have a flower.” And I took a rose from a vase and fastened it in her sash. She sighed a sigh of ineffable satisfaction, as if her cup of happiness were now full. I turned my face away to conceal a smile I

could not suppress : there was something ludicrous as well as painful in the little Parisienne's earnest and innate devotion to matters of dress.

A soft sound of rising now became audible ; the curtain was swept back from the arch ; through it appeared the dining-room, with its lit lustre pouring down light on the silver and glass of a magnificent dessert-service covering a long table ; a band of ladies stood in the opening ; they entered, and the curtain fell behind them.

There were but eight ; yet somehow as they flocked in, they gave the impression of a much larger number. Some of them were very tall ; many were dressed in white ; and all had a sweeping amplitude of array that seemed to magnify their persons as a mist magnifies the moon. I rose and curtsied to them : one or two bent their heads in return ; the others only stared at me.

They dispersed about the room ; reminding me, by the lightness and buoyancy of their movements, of a flock of white plummy birds. Some of them threw themselves in half-reclining positions on the sofas and ottomans ; some bent over the tables and examined the flowers and books ; the rest gathered in a group round the fire : all talked in a low but

clear tone which seemed habitual to them. I knew their names afterwards, and may as well mention them now.

First, there was Mrs. Eshton and two of her daughters. She had evidently been a handsome woman, and was well preserved still. Of her daughters, the eldest, Amy, was rather little; naïve, and child-like in face and manner, and piquant in form: her white muslin dress and blue sash became her well. The second, Louisa, was taller and more elegant in figure; with a very pretty face, of that order the French term "minois chiffonné:" both sisters were fair as lilies.

Lady Lynn was a large and stout personage of about forty; very erect, very haughty-looking, richly dressed in a satin robe of changeful sheen: her dark hair shone glossily under the shade of an azure plume, and within the circlet of a band of gems.

Mrs. Colonel Dent was less showy; but, I thought, more lady-like. She had a slight figure, a pale, gentle face, and fair hair. Her black satin dress, her scarf of rich foreign lace, and her pearl ornaments, pleased me better than the rainbow radiance of the titled dame.

But the three most distinguished—partly

perhaps, because the tallest figures of the band—were the Dowager Lady Ingram and her daughters, Blanche and Mary. They were all three of the loftiest stature of woman. The dowager might be between forty and fifty: her shape was still fine; her hair (by candle light at least) still black; her teeth, too, were still apparently perfect. Most people would have termed her a splendid woman of her age: and so she was, no doubt, physically speaking; but then there was an expression of almost insupportable haughtiness in her bearing and countenance. She had Roman features and a double chin, disappearing into a throat like a pillar: these features appeared to me not only inflated and darkened, but even furrowed with pride; and the chin was sustained by the same principle, in a position of almost preternatural erectness. She had, likewise, a fierce and a hard eye: it reminded me of Mrs. Reed's; she mouthed her words in speaking; her voice was deep, its inflexions very pompous, very dogmatical,—very intolerable, in short. A crimson velvet robe, and a shawl turban of some gold-wrought Indian fabric, invested her (I suppose she thought) with a truly imperial dignity.

Blanche and Mary were of equal stature,—

straight and tall as poplars. Mary was too slim for her height; but Blanche was moulded like a Dian. I regarded her, of course, with special interest. First, I wished to see whether her appearance accorded with Mrs. Fairfax's description; secondly, whether it at all resembled the fancy miniature I had painted of her; and thirdly—it will out!—whether it were such as I should fancy likely to suit Mr. Rochester's taste.

As far as person went, she answered point for point, both to my picture and Mrs. Fairfax's description. The noble bust, the sloping shoulders, the graceful neck, the dark eyes and black ringlets were all there:—but her face?—Her face was like her mother's; a youthful, unfurrowed likeness: the same low brow, the same high features, the same pride. It was not, however, so saturnine a pride: she laughed continually; her laugh was satirical, and so was the habitual expression of her arched and haughty lip.

Genius is said to be self-conscious: I cannot tell whether Miss Ingram was a genius, but she was self-conscious—remarkably self-conscious indeed. She entered into a discourse on botany with the gentle Mrs. Dent. It seems Mrs. Dent had not studied that science:

though, as she said, she liked flowers, “ especially wild ones ;” Miss Ingram had, and she ran over its vocabulary with an air. I presently perceived she was (what is vernacularly termed) *trailing* Mrs. Dent ; that is, playing on her ignorance : her *trail* might be clever, but it was decidedly not good-natured. She played : her execution was brilliant ; she sang : her voice was fine ; she talked French apart to her mama ; and she talked it well, with fluency and with a good accent.

Mary had a milder and more open countenance than Blanche ; softer features too, and a skin some shades fairer (Miss Ingram was dark as a Spaniard)—but Mary was deficient in life : her face lacked expression, her eye lustre ; she had nothing to say, and having once taken her seat, remained fixed like a statue in its niche. The sisters were both attired in spotless white.

And did I now think Miss Ingram such a choice as Mr. Rochester would be likely to make ? I could not tell—I did not know his taste in female beauty. If he liked the majestic, she was the very type of majesty : then she was accomplished, sprightly. Most gentlemen would admire her, I thought ; and that he *did* admire her, I already seemed to have

obtained proof: to remove the last shade of doubt, it remained but to see them together.

You are not to suppose, reader, that Adèle has all this time been sitting motionless on the stool at my feet: no; when the ladies entered, she rose, advanced to meet them, made a stately reverence, and said, with gravity,—

“ Bon jour, mesdames.”

And Miss Ingram had looked down at her with a mocking air, and exclaimed, “ Oh, what a little puppet !”

Lady Lynn had remarked, “ It is Mr. Rochester’s ward, I suppose—the little French girl he was speaking of.”

Mrs. Dent had kindly taken her hand, and given her a kiss. Amy and Louisa Eshton had cried out simultaneously,—

“ What a love of a child !”

And then they had called her to a sofa, where she now sat, ensconced between them, chattering alternately in French and broken English; absorbing not only the young ladies’ attention, but that of Mrs. Eshton and Lady Lynn, and getting spoilt to her heart’s content.

At last coffee is brought in, and the gentlemen are summoned. I sit in the shade—if any shade there be in this brilliantly lit apartment;

the window-curtain half hides me. Again the arch yawns: they come. The collective appearance of the gentlemen, like that of the ladies, is very imposing: they are all costumed in black; most of them are tall, some young. Henry and Frederick Lynn are very dashing sparks, indeed; and Colonel Dent is a fine soldierly man. Mr. Eshton, the magistrate of the district, is gentleman-like: his hair is quite white, his eyebrows and whiskers still dark, which gives him something of the appearance of a "père noble de théâtre." Lord Ingram, like his sisters, is very tall; like them, also, he is handsome; but he shares Mary's apathetic and listless look: he seems to have more length of limb than vivacity of blood or vigour of brain.

And where is Mr. Rochester?

He comes in last: I am not looking at the arch, yet I see him enter. I try to concentrate my attention on these netting-needles, on the meshes of the purse I am forming—I wish to think only of the work I have in my hands, to see only the silver beads and silk threads that lie in my lap; whereas, I distinctly behold his figure, and I inevitably recall the moment when I last saw it: just after I had rendered him, what he deemed, an essential service—and

he, holding my hand, and looking down on my face, surveyed me with eyes that revealed a heart full and eager to overflow; in whose emotions I had a part. How near had I approached him at that moment! What had occurred since, calculated to change his and my relative positions? Yet now, how distant, how far estranged we were! So far estranged, that I did not expect him to come and speak to me. I did not wonder, when, without looking at me, he took a seat at the other side of the room, and began conversing with some of the ladies.

No sooner did I see that his attention was riveted on them, and that I might gaze without being observed, than my eyes were drawn involuntarily to his face: I could not keep their lids under control: they would rise, and the irids would fix on him. I looked, and had an acute pleasure in looking,—a precious, yet poignant pleasure; pure gold, with a steely point of agony: a pleasure like what the thirst-perishing man might feel who knows the well to which he has crept is poisoned, yet stoops and drinks divine draughts nevertheless.

Most true is it that “beauty is in the eye of the gazer.” My master’s colourless, olive face, square, massive brow, broad and jetty

eyebrows, deep eyes, strong features, firm, grim mouth,—all energy, decision, will,—were not beautiful, according to rule; but they were more than beautiful to me: they were full of an interest, an influence that quite mastered me,—that took my feelings from my own power and fettered them in his. I had not intended to love him: the reader knows I had wrought hard to extirpate from my soul the germs of love there detected; and now, at the first renewed view of him, they spontaneously revived, green and strong! He made me love him without looking at me.

I compared him with his guests. What was the gallant grace of the Lynns, the languid elegance of Lord Ingram,—even the military distinction of Colonel Dent contrasted with his look of native pith and genuine power? I had no sympathy in their appearance, their expression: yet I could imagine that most observers would call them attractive, handsome, imposing; while they would pronounce Mr. Rochester at once harsh-featured and melancholy-looking. I saw them smile, laugh—it was nothing: the light of the candles had as much soul in it as their smile; the tinkle of the bell as much significance as their laugh. I saw Mr. Rochester smile:—his stern features

softened ; his eye grew both brilliant and gentle, its ray both searching and sweet. He was talking, at the moment, to Louisa and Amy Eshton. I wondered to see them receive with calm that look which seemed to me so penetrating : I expected their eyes to fall, their colour to rise under it ; yet I was glad when I found they were in no sense moved. "He is not to them what he is to me," I thought : "he is not of their kind. I believe he is of mine ;—I am sure he is,—I feel akin to him,—I understand the language of his countenance and movements : though rank and wealth sever us widely, I have something in my brain and heart, in my blood and nerves, that assimilates me mentally to him. Did I say, a few days since, that I had nothing to do with him but to receive my salary at his hands ? Did I forbid myself to think of him in any other light than as a paymaster ? Blasphemy against nature ! Every good, true, vigorous feeling I have, gathers impulsively round him. I know I must conceal my sentiments : I must smother hope ; I must remember that he cannot care much for me. For when I say that I am of his kind, I do not mean that I have his force to influence, and his spell to attract : I mean only that I have certain tastes and

feelings in common with him. I must, then, repeat continually that we are for ever sundered:—and yet, while I breathe and think, I must love him.

Coffee is handed. The ladies, since the gentlemen entered, have become lively as larks: conversation waxes brisk and merry. Colonel Dent and Mr. Eshton argue on politics; their wives listen. The two proud dowagers, Lady Lynn and Lady Ingram, confabulate together. Sir George—whom, by-the-by, I have forgotten to describe,—a very big, and very fresh-looking country gentleman, stands before their sofa, coffee-cup in hand, and occasionally puts in a word. Mr. Frederick Lynn has taken a seat beside Mary Ingram, and is showing her the engravings of a splendid volume: she looks, smiles now and then, but apparently says little. The tall and phlegmatic Lord Ingram leans with folded arms on the chair-back of the little and lively Amy Eshton; she glances up at him, and chatters like a wren: she likes him better than she does Mr. Rochester. Henry Lynn has taken possession of an ottoman at the feet of Louisa; Adèle shares it with him: he is trying to talk French with her, and Louisa laughs at his blunders. With whom will Blanche Ingram

pair? She is standing alone at the table, bending gracefully over an album. She seems waiting to be sought; but she will not wait too long: she herself selects a mate.

Mr. Rochester, having quitted the Eshtons, stands on the hearth as solitary as she stands by the table; she confronts him, taking her station on the opposite side of the mantel-piece.

“Mr. Rochester, I thought you were not fond of children?”

“Nor am I.”

“Then, what induced you to take charge of such a little doll as that? (pointing to Adèle). Where did you pick her up?”

“I did not pick her up, she was left on my hands.”

“You should have sent her to school.”

“I could not afford it: schools are so dear.”

“Why, I suppose you have a governess for her: I saw a person with her just now—is she gone? Oh, no! there she is still behind the window-curtain. You pay her, of course: I should think it quite as expensive,—more so; for you have them both to keep in addition.”

I feared—or should I say, hoped?—the allusion to me would make Mr. Rochester glance

my way; and I involuntarily shrunk further into the shade: but he never turned his eyes.

“I have not considered the subject,” said he indifferently, looking straight before him.

“No—you men never do consider economy and common sense. You should hear mama on the chapter of governesses: Mary and I have had, I should think, a dozen at least in our day; half of them detestable and the rest ridiculous, and all incubi—were they not, mama?”

“Did you speak, my own?”

The young lady thus claimed as the Dowager’s special property, reiterated her question with an explanation.

“My dearest, don’t mention governesses: the word makes me nervous. I have suffered a martyrdom from their incompetency and caprice: I thank Heaven I have now done with them!”

Mrs. Dent here bent over to the pious lady, and whispered something in her ear: I suppose from the answer elicited, it was a reminder that one of the anathematized race was present.

“Tant pis!” said her ladyship, “I hope it may do her good!” Then, in a lower tone, but still loud enough for me to hear, “I

noticed her : I am a judge of physiognomy, and in hers I see all the faults of her class."

"What are they, Madam?" inquired Mr. Rochester aloud.

"I will tell you in your private ear," replied she, wagging her turban three times with portentous significancy.

"But my curiosity will be past its appetite : it craves food now."

"Ask Blanche : she is nearer you than I."

"Oh, don't refer him to me, mama ! I have just one word to say of the whole tribe : they are a nuisance. Not that I ever suffered much from them : I took care to turn the tables. What tricks Theodore and I used to play on our Miss Wilsons, and Mrs. Greys, and Madame Jouberts ! Mary was always too sleepy to join in a plot with spirit. The best fun was with Madame Joubert : Miss Wilson was a poor sickly thing, lachrymose and low-spirited : not worth the trouble of vanquishing, in short ; and Mrs. Grey was coarse and insensible : no blow took effect on her. But poor Madame Joubert ! I see her yet in her raging passions, when we had driven her to extremities—spilt our tea, crumbled our bread and butter, tossed our books up to the ceiling, and played a charivari with the ruler and desk, the fender and

fire-irons. Theodore, do you remember those merry days?"

"Yaas, to be sure I do," drawled Lord Ingram: "and the poor old stick used to cry out 'Oh you villains childs!'—and then we sermonized her on the presumption of attempting to teach such clever blades as we were, when she was herself so ignorant."

"We did: and Tedo, you know, I helped you in prosecuting (or persecuting) your tutor, whey-faced Mr. Vining—the parson in the pip, as we used to call him. He and Miss Wilson took the liberty of falling in love with each other—at least Tedo and I thought so: we surprised sundry tender glances and sighs which we interpreted as tokens of 'Ila belle passion,' and I promise you the public soon had the benefit of our discovery: we employed it as a sort of lever to hoist our dead-weights from the house. Dear mama there, as soon as she got an inkling of the business, found out that it was of an immoral tendency. Did you not, my lady-mother?"

"Certainly, my best. And I was quite right; depend on that: there are a thousand reasons why liaisons between governesses and tutors should never be tolerated a moment in any well-regulated house; firstly—"

“Oh gracious, mama! Spare us the enumeration! Au reste, we all know them: danger of bad example to innocence of childhood; distractions and consequent neglect of duty on the part of the attached; mutual alliance and reliance; confidence thence resulting—inso-
lence accompanying—mutiny and general blow-up. Am I right, Baroness Ingram of Ingram Park?”

“My lily-flower, you are right now as always.”

“Then no more need be said: change the subject.”

Amy Eshton, not hearing or not heeding this dictum, joined in with her soft, infantine tone: “Louisa and I used to quiz our governess too; but she was such a good creature, she would bear anything: nothing put her out. She was never cross with us; was she, Louisa?”

“No, never: we might do what we pleased; ransack her desk and her workbox, and turn her drawers inside out; and she was so good-natured, she would give us anything we asked for.”

“I suppose now,” said Miss Ingram, curling her lip sarcastically, we shall have an abstract of the memoirs of all the governesses extant: in order to avert such a visitation, I

again move the introduction of a new topic. Mr. Rochester, do you second my motion?"

"Madam, I support you on this point as on every other."

"Then on me be the onus of bringing it forward. Signior Eduardo are you in voice to-night?"

"Donna Bianca, if you command it, I will be."

"Then Signior, I lay on you my sovereign behest to furbish up your lungs and other vocal organs, as they will be wanted on my royal service."

"Who would not be the Rizzio of so divine a Mary?"

"A fig for Rizzio!" cried she, tossing her head with all its curls, as she moved to the piano. "It is my opinion the fiddler David must have been an insipid sort of fellow; I like black Bothwell better: to my mind a man is nothing without a spice of the devil in him; and history may say what it will of James Hepburn, but I have a notion, he was just the sort of wild, fierce, bandit-hero whom I could have consented to gift with my hand."

"Gentlemen, you hear! Now which of you most resembles Bothwell?" cried Mr. Rochester.

“ I should say the preference lies with you,” responded Colonel Dent.

“ On my honour, I am much obliged to you,” was the reply.

Miss Ingram, who had now seated herself with proud grace at the piano, spreading out her snowy robes in queenly amplitude, commenced a brilliant prelude ; talking meantime. She appeared to be on her high horse to-night ; both her words and her air seemed intended to excite not only the admiration, but the amazement of her auditors : she was evidently bent on striking them as something very dash- ing and daring indeed.

“ Oh, I am so sick of the young men of the present day !” exclaimed she, rattling away at the instrument. “ Poor, puny things not fit to stir a step beyond papa’s park-gates : nor to go even so far without mama’s permission and guardianship ! Creatures so absorbed in care about their pretty faces and their white hands, and their small feet ; as if a man had anything to do with beauty ! As if loveliness were not the special prerogative of woman—her legitimate appanage and heritage ! I grant an ugly *woman* is a blot on the fair face of creation ; but as to the *gentlemen*, let them be solicitous to possess only strength and valour : let

their motto be :—Hunt, shoot and fight : the rest is not worth a filip. Such should be my device, were I a man.”

“Whenever I marry,” she continued, after a pause which none interrupted, “I am resolved my husband shall not be a rival, but a foil to me. I will suffer no competitor near the throne ; I shall exact an undivided homage : his devotions shall not be shared between me and the shape he sees in his mirror. Mr. Rochester, now sing, and I will play for you.”

“I am all obedience,” was the response.

“Here then is a Corsair-song. Know that I doat on Corsairs ; and for that reason, sing it ‘con spirito.’”

“Commands from Miss Ingram’s lips would put spirit into a mug of milk and water.”

“Take care, then : if you don’t please me, I will shame you by showing how such things *should* be done.”

“That is offering a premium on incapacity : I shall now endeavour to fail.”

“Gardez-vous en bien ! If you err wilfully, I shall devise a proportionate punishment.”

“Miss Ingram ought to be clement, for she has it in her power to inflict a chastisement beyond mortal endurance.”

“Ha ! explain !” commanded the lady.

“Pardon me, madam: no need of explanation; your own fine sense must inform you that one of your frowns would be a sufficient substitute for capital punishment.”

“Sing!” said she, and again touching the piano, she commenced an accompaniment in spirited style.

“Now is my time to slip away,” thought I: but the tones that then severed the air arrested me. Mrs. Fairfax had said Mr. Rochester possessed a fine voice: he did—a mellow, powerful bass, into which he threw his own feeling, his own force; finding a way through the ear to the heart and there waking sensation strangely. I waited till the last deep and full vibration had expired—till the tide of talk, checked an instant, had resumed its flow; I then quitted my sheltered corner and made my exit by the side-door, which was fortunately near. Thence a narrow passage led into the hall: in crossing it, I perceived my sandal was loose; I stopped to tie it, kneeling down for that purpose on the mat at the foot of the staircase. I heard the dining-room door unclose; a gentleman came out; rising hastily, I stood face to face with him: it was Mr. Rochester.

“How do you do?” he asked.

“ I am very well, sir.”

“ Why did you not come and speak to me in the room ?”

I thought I might have retorted the question on him who put it : but I would not take that freedom. I answered :—

“ I did not wish to disturb you, as you seemed engaged, sir.”

“ What have you been doing during my absence ?”

“ Nothing particular : teaching Adèle as usual.”

“ And getting a good deal paler than you were—as I saw at first sight. What is the matter ?”

“ Nothing at all, sir.”

“ Did you take any cold that night you half drowned me ?”

“ Not the least.”

“ Return to the drawing-room : you are deserting too early,”

“ I am tired, sir.”

He looked at me for a minute.

“ And a little depressed ;” he said, “ What about ? Tell me.”

“ Nothing—nothing, sir. I am not depressed.”

“ But I affirm that you are : so much de-

pressed that a few more words would bring tears to your eyes—indeed, they are there now, shining and swimming; and a bead has slipped from the lash and fallen on to the flag. If I had time, and was not in mortal dread of some prating prig of a servant passing, I would know what all this means. Well, to-night I excuse you; but understand that so long as my visitors stay, I expect you to appear in the drawing-room every evening: it is my wish; don't neglect it. Now go, and send Sophie for Adèle. Good night, my ——” He stopped, bit his lip, and abruptly left me.

CHAPTER III.

MERRY days were these at Thornfield Hall; and busy days too: how different from the first three months of stillness, monotony, and solitude I had passed beneath its roof! All sad feelings seemed now driven from the house, all gloomy associations forgotten: there was life everywhere, movement all day long. You could not now traverse the gallery, once so hushed, nor enter the front chamber, once so tenantless, without encountering a smart lady's maid or a dandy valet.

The kitchen, the butler's pantry, the servant's hall, the entrance hall, were equally alive; and the saloons were only left void and still, when the blue sky and halcyon sunshine of the genial spring weather called their occupants out into the grounds. Even when that weather was broken, and continuous rain set in for some days, no damp seemed cast over

enjoyment: in-door amusements only became more lively and varied, in consequence of the stop put to out-door gaiety.

I wondered what they were going to do the first evening a change of entertainment was proposed: they spoke of "playing charades," but in my ignorance I did not understand the term. The servants were called in, the dining-room tables wheeled away, the lights otherwise disposed, the chairs placed in a semicircle opposite the arch. While Mr. Rochester and the other gentlemen directed these alterations, the ladies were running up and down stairs ringing for their maids. Mrs. Fairfax was summoned to give information respecting the resources of the house in shawls, dresses, draperies of any kind; and certain wardrobes of the third story were ransacked, and their contents, in the shape of brocaded and hooped petticoats, satin sacques, black modes, lace lappets, &c., were brought down in armfuls by the Abigails: then a selection was made, and such things as were chosen were carried to the boudoir within the drawing-room.

Meantime, Mr. Rochester had again summoned the ladies round him, and was selecting certain of their number to be of his party.

“Miss Ingram is mine, of course,” said he: afterwards he named the two Misses Eshton, and Mrs. Dent. He looked at me: I happened to be near him, as I had been fastening the clasp of Mrs. Dent’s bracelet, which had got loose.

“Will you play?” he asked. I shook my head. He did not insist, which I rather feared he would have done: he allowed me to return quietly to my usual seat.

He and his aids now withdrew behind the curtain: the other party, which was headed by Colonel Dent, sat down on the crescent of chairs. One of the gentlemen, Mr. Eshton, observing me, seemed to propose that I should be asked to join them; but Lady Ingram instantly negatived the notion.

“No,” I heard her say; “she looks too stupid for any game of the sort.”

Ere long, a bell tinkled, and the curtain drew up. Within the arch, the bulky figure of Sir George Lynn, whom Mr. Rochester had likewise chosen, was seen enveloped in a white sheet: before him, on a table, lay open a large book; and at his side stood Amy Eshton, draped in Mr. Rochester’s cloak, and holding a book in her hand. Somebody, unseen, rung the bell merrily; then Adèle (who

had insisted on being one of her guardian's party) bounded forward, scattering round her the contents of a basket of flowers she carried on her arm. Then appeared the magnificent figure of Miss Ingram, clad in white, a long veil on her head, and a wreath of roses round her brow: by her side walked Mr. Rochester, and together they drew near the table. They knelt; while Mrs. Dent and Louisa Eshton, dressed also in white, took up their stations behind them. A ceremony followed, in dumb show, in which it was easy to recognize the pantomime of a marriage. At its termination, Colonel Dent and his party consulted in whispers for two minutes, then the Colonel called out,—

“Bride!” Mr. Rochester bowed, and the curtain fell.

A considerable interval elapsed before it again rose. Its second rising displayed a more elaborately prepared scene than the last. The drawing-room, as I have before observed, was raised two steps above the dining-room, and on the top of the upper step, placed a yard or two back within the room, appeared a large marble basin, which I recognized as an ornament of the conservatory—where it usually stood surrounded by exotics, and tenanted by

gold fish—and whence it must have been transported with some trouble, on account of its size and weight.

Seated on the carpet, by the side of this basin, was seen Mr. Rochester, costumed in shawls, with a turban on his head. His dark eyes and swarth skin and Paynim features suited the costume exactly: he looked the very model of an eastern emir, an agent or a victim of the bowstring. Presently advanced into view Miss Ingram. She, too, was attired in oriental fashion: a crimson scarf tied sash-like round the waist; an embroidered handkerchief knotted about her temples; her beautifully-moulded arms bare, one of them upraised in the act of supporting a pitcher, poised gracefully on her head. Both her cast of form and feature, her complexion and her general air, suggested the idea of some Israelitish princess of the patriarchal days; and such was doubtless the character she intended to represent.

She approached the basin, and bent over it as if to fill her pitcher; she again lifted it to her head. The personage on the well-brink now seemed to accost her; to make some request:—"She hastened, let down her pitcher on her hand and gave him to drink." From the

bosom of his robe, he then produced a casket, opened it and showed magnificent bracelets and ear rings; she acted astonishment and admiration; kneeling, he laid the treasure at her feet; incredulity and delight were expressed by her looks and gestures; the stranger fastened the bracelets on her arms, and the rings in her ears. It was Eliezer and Rebecca: the camels only were wanting.

The divining party again laid their heads together: apparently they could not agree about the word or syllable this scene illustrated. Colonel Dent, their spokesman, demanded "the tableau of the Whole;" whereupon the curtain again descended.

On its third rising only a portion of the drawing-room was disclosed; the rest being concealed by a screen, hung with some sort of dark and coarse drapery. The marble basin was removed; in its place stood a deal table and a kitchen chair: these objects were visible by a very dim light proceeding from a horn lantern, the wax candles being all extinguished.

Amidst this sordid scene, sat a man with his clenched hands resting on his knees, and his eyes bent on the ground. I knew Mr. Rochester; though the begrimed face, the disordered dress (his coat hanging loose from

one arm, as if it had been almost torn from his back in a scuffle), the desperate and scowling countenance, the rough, bristling hair might well have disguised him. As he moved, a chain clanked: to his wrists were attached fetters.

“Bridewell!” exclaimed Colonel Dent, and the charade was solved.

A sufficient interval having elapsed for the performers to resume their ordinary costume, they re-entered the dining-room. Mr. Rochester led in Miss Ingram; she was complimenting him on his acting.

“Do you know,” said she, “that, of the three characters, I liked you in the last best? Oh, had you but lived a few years earlier, what a gallant gentleman-highwayman you would have made!”

“Is all the soot washed from my face?” he asked, turning it towards her.

“Alas! yes; the more’s the pity! Nothing could be more becoming to your complexion than that ruffian’s rouge.”

“You would like a hero of the road then?”

“An English hero of the road would be the next best thing to an Italian bandit; and that could only be surpassed by a Levantine pirate.”

“Well, whatever I am, remember you are my wife: we were married an hour since, in the presence of all these witnesses.” She giggled, and her colour rose.

“Now, Dent,” continued Mr. Rochester, “it is your turn.” And as the other party withdrew, he and his band took the vacated seats. Miss Ingram placed herself at her leader’s right hand; the other diviners filled the chairs on each side of him and her. I did not now watch the actors; I no longer waited with interest for the curtain to rise: my attention was absorbed by the spectators; my eyes, erewhile fixed on the arch, were now irresistibly attracted to the semicircle of chairs. What charade Colonel Dent and his party played, what word they chose, how they acquitted themselves, I no longer remember; but I still see the consultation which followed each scene: I see Mr. Rochester turn to Miss Ingram, and Miss Ingram to him; I see her incline her head towards him, till the jetty curls almost touch his shoulder and wave against his cheek; I hear their mutual whisperings; I recall their interchanged glances; and something even of the feeling roused by the spectacle returns in memory at this moment.

I have told you reader, that I had learnt to love Mr. Rochester : I could not unlove him now, merely because I found that he had ceased to notice me—because I might pass hours in his presence, and he would never once turn his eyes in my direction—because I saw all his attentions appropriated by a great lady, who scorned to touch me with the hem of her robes as she passed ; who, if ever her dark and imperious eye fell on me by chance, would withdraw it instantly as from an object too mean to merit observation. I could not unlove him, because I felt sure he would soon marry this very lady—because I read daily in her a proud security in his intentions respecting her—because I witnessed hourly in him a style of courtship which, if careless and choosing rather to be sought than to seek, was yet, in its very carelessness, captivating, and in its very pride, irresistible.

There was nothing to cool or banish love in these circumstances ; though much to create despair. Much too, you will think, reader, to engender jealousy : if a woman, in my position, could presume to be jealous of a woman in Miss Ingram's. But I was not jealous : or very rarely ;—the nature of the pain I suffered could not be explained by that word. Miss

Ingram was a mark beneath jealousy: she was too inferior to excite the feeling. Pardon the seeming paradox: I mean what I say. She was very showy, but she was not genuine: she had a fine person, many brilliant attainments; but her mind was poor, her heart barren by nature: nothing bloomed spontaneously on that soil; no unforced natural fruit delighted by its freshness. She was not good; she was not original: she used to repeat sounding phrases from books; she never offered, nor had, an opinion of her own. She advocated a high tone of sentiment; but she did not know the sensations of sympathy and pity: tenderness and truth were not in her. Too often she betrayed this, by the undue vent she gave to a spiteful antipathy she had conceived against little Adèle: pushing her away with some contumelious epithet if she happened to approach her; sometimes ordering her from the room, and always treating her with coldness and acrimony. Other eyes besides mine watched these manifestations of character—watched them closely, keenly, shrewdly. Yes: the future bridegroom, Mr. Rochester himself, exercised over his intended a ceaseless surveillance: and it was from this sagacity—this guardedness of his—this perfect, clear conscious-

ness of his fair one's defects—this obvious absence of passion in his sentiments towards her, that my ever-torturing pain arose.

I saw he was going to marry her, for family, perhaps political reasons ; because her rank and connexions suited him ; I felt he had not given her his love, and that her qualifications were ill adapted to win from him that treasure. This was the point—this was where the nerve was touched and teased—this was where the fever was sustained and fed: *she could not charm him.*

If she had managed the victory at once, and he had yielded and sincerely laid his heart at her feet, I should have covered my face, turned to the wall, and (figuratively) have died to them. If Miss Ingram had been a good and noble woman, endowed with force, fervour, kindness, sense, I should have had one vital struggle with two tigers—jealousy and despair : then, my heart torn out and devoured, I should have admired her—acknowledged her excellence, and been quiet for the rest of my days : and the more absolute her superiority, the deeper would have been my admiration—the more truly tranquil my quiescence. But as matters really stood, to watch Miss Ingram's efforts at fascinating Mr. Rochester ; to witness

their repeated failure—herself unconscious that they did fail ; vainly fancying that each shaft launched, hit the mark, and infatuatedly pluming herself on success, when her pride and self-complacency repelled further and further what she wished to allure—to witness *this*, was to be at once under ceaseless excitation and ruthless restraint.

Because, when she failed, I saw how she might have succeeded. Arrows that continually glanced off from Mr. Rochester's breast and fell harmless at his feet, might, I knew, if shot by a surer hand, have quivered keen in his proud heart—have called love into his stern eye, and softness into his sardonic face : or, better still, without weapons, a silent conquest might have been won.

“ Why can she not influence him more, when she is privileged to draw so near to him ? ” I asked myself. “ Surely she cannot truly like him ; or not like him with true affection ! If she did, she need not coin her smiles so lavishly ; flash her glances so unremittingly ; manufacture airs so elaborate, graces so multitudinous. It seems to me, that she might, by merely sitting quietly at his side, saying little and looking less, get nigher his heart. I have seen in his face a far different expression

from that which hardens it now while she is so vivaciously accosting him ; but then it came of itself : it was not elicited by meretricious arts and calculated manœuvres ; and one had but to accept it—to answer what he asked, without pretension, to address him when needful without grimace—and it increased, and grew kinder and more genial, and warmed one like a fostering sunbeam, How will she manage to please him when they are married ? I do not think she will manage it : and yet it might be managed ; and his wife might, I verily believe, be the very happiest woman the sun shines on.”

I have not yet said anything condemnatory of Mr. Rochester’s project of marrying for interest and connexions. It surprised me when I first discovered that such was his intention : I had thought him a man unlikely to be influenced by motives so common-place in his choice of a wife ; but the longer I considered the position, education, &c., of the parties, the less I felt justified in judging and blaming either him or Miss Ingram, for acting in conformity to ideas and principles instilled into them, doubtless, from their childhood. All their class held these principles : I supposed, then, they had reasons for holding them such

as I could not fathom. It seemed to me that, were I a gentleman like him, I would take to my bosom only such a wife as I could love; but the very obviousness of the advantages to the husband's own happiness, offered by this plan, convinced me that there must be arguments against its general adoption of which I was quite ignorant: otherwise I felt sure all the world would act as I wished to act.

But in other points, as well as this, I was growing very lenient to my master: I was forgetting all his faults, for which I had once kept a sharp look-out. It had formerly been my endeavour to study all sides of his character: to take the bad with the good; and from the just weighing of both, to form an equitable judgment. Now I saw no bad. The sarcasm that had repelled, the harshness that had startled me once, were only like keen condiments in a choice dish: their presence was pungent, but their absence would be felt as comparatively insipid. And as for the vague something—was it a sinister or a sorrowful, a designing or a desponding expression?—that opened upon a careful observer, now and then, in his eye, and closed again before one could fathom the strange depth partially disclosed; that something which used to make me fear

and shrink, as if I had been wandering amongst volcanic-looking hills, and had suddenly felt the ground quiver and seen it gape: that something, I, at intervals, beheld still; and with throbbing heart, but not with palsied nerves. Instead of wishing to shun, I longed only to dare—to divine it; and I thought Miss Ingram happy, because one day she might look into the abyss at her leisure, explore its secrets and analyze their nature.

Meantime, while I thought only of my master and his future bride—saw only them, heard only their discourse, and considered only their movements of importance—the rest of the party were occupied with their own separate interests and pleasures. The ladies Lynn and Ingram continued to consort in solemn conferences; where they nodded their two turbans at each other, and held up their four hands in confronting gestures of surprise, or mystery, or horror, according to the theme on which their gossip ran, like a pair of magnified puppets. Mild Mrs. Dent talked with good-natured Mrs. Eshton; and the two sometimes bestowed a courteous word or smile on me. Sir George Lynn, Colonel Dent, and Mr. Eshton, discussed politics, or county affairs, or justice business. Lord Ingram flirted with Amy

Eshton; Louisa played and sang to and with one of the Messrs. Lynn; and Mary Ingram listened languidly to the gallant speeches of the other. Sometimes all, as with one consent, suspended their by-play to observe and listen to the principal actors: for, after all, Mr. Rochester, and—because closely connected with him—Miss Ingram, were the life and soul of the party. If he was absent from the room an hour, a perceptible dulness seemed to steal over the spirits of his guests; and his re-entrance was sure to give a fresh impulse to the vivacity of conversation.

The want of his animating influence appeared to be peculiarly felt one day that he had been summoned to Millcote on business, and was not likely to return till late. The afternoon was wet: a walk the party had proposed to take to see a gipsy camp, lately pitched on a common beyond Hay, was consequently deferred. Some of the gentlemen were gone to the stables: the younger ones, together with the younger ladies, were playing billiards in the billiard-room. The dowagers Ingram and Lynn sought solace in a quiet game at cards. Blanche Ingram, after having repelled, by supercilious taciturnity, some efforts of Mrs. Dent and Mrs. Eshton to draw her into con-

versation, had first murmured over some sentimental tunes and airs on the piano, and then, having fetched a novel from the library, had flung herself in haughty listlessness on a sofa, and prepared to beguile, by the spell of fiction, the tedious hours of absence. The room and the house were silent: only now and then the merriment of the billiard players was heard from above.

It was verging on dusk, and the clock had already given warning of the hour to dress for dinner, when little Adèle, who knelt by me in the drawing-room window seat, exclaimed:—

“Voilà Monsieur Rochester, qui revient!”

I turned, and Miss Ingram darted forwards from her sofa: the others, too, looked up from their several occupations; for at the same time a crunching of wheels, and a splashing tramp of horse-hoofs became audible on the wet gravel. A post-chaise was approaching.

“What can possess him to come home in that style?” said Miss Ingram. “He rode Mesrour (the black horse) did he not, when he went out? and Pilot was with him:—what has he done with the animals?”

As she said this, she approached her tall person and ample garments so near the window, that I was obliged to bend back almost to the

breaking of my spine: in her eagerness she did not observe me at first, but when she did, she curled her lip and moved to another casement. The post-chaise stopped; the driver rang the door-bell, and a gentleman alighted, attired in travelling garb: but it was not Mr. Rochester; it was a tall, fashionable-looking man, a stranger.

“Provoking!” exclaimed Miss Ingram: “you tiresome monkey!” (apostrophizing Adèle) “who perched you up in the window to give false intelligence?” and she cast on me an angry glance, as if I were in fault.

Some parleying was audible in the hall, and soon the new comer entered. He bowed to Lady Ingram, as deeming her the eldest lady present.

“It appears I come at an inopportune time, madam,” said he, “when my friend, Mr. Rochester, is from home; but I arrive from a very long journey, and I think I may presume so far on old and intimate acquaintance as to install myself here till he returns.”

His manner was polite; his accent, in speaking, struck me as being somewhat unusual,—not precisely foreign, but still not altogether English; his age might be about Mr. Rochester’s,—between thirty and forty; his com-

plexion was singularly sallow: otherwise he was a fine-looking man, at first sight especially. On closer examination, you detected something in his face that displeased: or rather, that failed to please. His features were regular, but too relaxed: his eye was large and well cut, but the life looking out of it was a tame, vacant life—at least so I thought.

The sound of the dressing-bell dispersed the party. It was not till after dinner that I saw him again: he then seemed quite at his ease. But I liked his physiognomy even less than before: it struck me as being, at the same time, unsettled and inanimate. His eye wandered, and had no meaning in its wandering: this gave him an odd look, such as I never remembered to have seen. For a handsome and not an unamiable-looking man, he repelled me exceedingly: there was no power in that smooth-skinned face of a full oval shape; no firmness in that aquiline nose, and small, cherry mouth; there was no thought on the low, even forehead; no command in that blank, brown eye.

As I sat in my usual nook, and looked at him with the light of the girandoles on the mantelpiece beaming full over him—for he occupied an arm-chair, drawn close to the fire,

and kept shrinking still nearer, as if he were cold—I compared him with Mr. Rochester. I think (with deference be it spoken) the contrast could not be much greater between a sleek gander and a fierce falcon: between a meek sheep and the rough-coated keen-eyed dog, its guardian.

He had spoken of Mr. Rochester as an old friend. A curious friendship theirs must have been: a pointed illustration, indeed, of the old adage that “extremes meet.”

Two or three of the gentlemen sat near him, and I caught at times scraps of their conversation across the room. At first I could not make much sense of what I heard; for the discourse of Louisa Eshton and Mary Ingram, who sat nearer to me, confused the fragmentary sentences that reached me at intervals. These last were discussing the stranger: they both called him “a beautiful man.” Louisa said he was “a love of a creature,” and she “adored him;” and Mary instanced his “pretty little mouth, and nice nose,” as her ideal of the charming.

“And what a sweet-tempered forehead he has!” cried Louisa,—“so smooth—none of those frowning irregularities I dislike so much: and such a placid eye and smile!”

And then, to my great relief, Mr. Henry Lynn summoned them to the other side of the room, to settle some point about the deferred excursion to Hay Common.

I was now able to concentrate my attention on the group by the fire, and I presently gathered that the new comer was called Mr. Mason: then I learnt that he was but just arrived in England, and that he came from some hot country; which was the reason, doubtless, his face was so sallow, and that he sat so near the hearth, and wore a surtout in the house. Presently the words Jamaica, Kingston, Spanish Town, indicated the West Indies as his residence; and it was with no little surprise I gathered, ere long, that he had there first seen and become acquainted with Mr. Rochester. He spoke of his friend's dislike of the burning heats, the hurricanes, and rainy seasons of that region. I knew Mr. Rochester had been a traveller: Mrs. Fairfax had said so; but I thought the continent of Europe had bounded his wanderings: till now I had never heard a hint given of visits to more distant shores.

I was pondering these things, when an incident, and a somewhat unexpected one, broke the thread of my musings. Mr. Mason, shiver-

ing as some one chanced to open the door, asked for more coal to be put on the fire, which had burnt out its flame, though its mass of cinder still shone hot and red. The footman who brought the coal, in going out, stopped near Mr. Eshton's chair, and said something to him in a low voice, of which I heard only the words, "old woman"—"quite troublesome."

"Tell her she shall be put in the stocks, if she does not take herself off," replied the magistrate.

"No—stop!" interrupted Colonel Dent. "Don't send her away, Eshton; we might turn the thing to account: better consult the ladies." And speaking aloud, he continued, "Ladies, you talked of going to Hay Common to visit the gipsy camp; Sam, here, says that one of the old Mother Bunches is in the servants' hall at this moment, and insists upon being brought in before 'the quality,' to tell them their fortunes. Would you like to see her?"

"Surely, Colonel," cried Lady Ingram, "you would not encourage such a low impostor? Dismiss her, by all means, at once!"

"But I cannot persuade her to go away, my lady," said the footman; "nor can any of

the servants: Mrs. Fairfax is with her just now, entreating her to be gone; but she has taken a chair in the chimney-corner, and says nothing shall stir her from it till she gets leave to come in here."

"What does she want?" asked Mrs. Eshton.

"'To tell the gentry their fortunes,' she says, ma'am: and she swears she must and will do it."

"What is she like?" inquired the Misses Eshton in a breath.

"A shockingly ugly old creature, Miss; almost as black as a crock."

"Why, she's a real sorceress!" cried Frederick Lynn. "Let us have her in, of course."

"To be sure," rejoined his brother; "it would be a thousand pities to throw away such a chance of fun."

"My dear boys, what are you thinking about?" exclaimed Lady Lynn.

"I cannot possibly countenance any such inconsistent proceeding," chimed in the Dowager Ingram.

"Indeed, mama, but you can—and will," pronounced the haughty voice of Blanche, as she turned round on the piano-stool; where till

now she had sat silent, apparently examining sundry sheets of music. "I have a curiosity to hear my fortune told: therefore, Sam, order the beldame forwards."

"My darling Blanche! recollect ——"

"I do—I recollect all you can suggest; and I must have my will—quick, Sam!"

"Yes—yes—yes!" cried all the juveniles, both ladies and gentlemen. "Let her come—it will be excellent sport!"

The footman still lingered. "She looks such a rough one," said he.

"Go!" ejaculated Miss Ingram, and the man went.

Excitement instantly seized the whole party: a running fire of raillery and jests was proceeding when Sam returned.

"She won't come now," said he. "She says it's not her mission to appear before the 'vulgar herd' (them's her words). I must show her into a room by herself, and then those who wish to consult her must go to her one by one."

"You see now, my queenly Blanche," began Lady Ingram, "she encroaches. Be advised, my angel-girl—and ——"

"Show her into the library, of course," cut in the "angel-girl." "It is not my mission

to listen to her before the vulgar herd either : I mean to have her all to myself. Is there a fire in the library ?”

“ Yes, ma’am—but she looks such a tinkler.”

“ Cease that chatter, blockhead ! and do my bidding.”

Again Sam vanished ; and mystery, animation, expectation rose to full flow once more.

“ She ’s ready now,” said the footman as he re-appeared. “ She wishes to know who will be her first visitor.”

“ I think I had better just look in upon her before any of the ladies go,” said Colonel Dent. “ Tell her, Sam, a gentleman is coming.”

Sam went and returned.

“ She says, sir, that she ’ll have no gentlemen ; they need not trouble themselves to come near her : nor,” he added, with difficulty suppressing a titter, “ any ladies either, except the young and single.”

“ By Jove, she has taste !” exclaimed Henry Lynn.

Miss Ingram rose solemnly : “ I go first,” she said, in a tone which might have befitted the leader of a forlorn hope, mounting a breach in the van of his men.

“ Oh, my best ! oh, my dearest ! pause—reflect !” was her mama’s cry ; but she swept

past her in stately silence, passed through the door which Colonel Dent held open, and we heard her enter the library.

A comparative silence ensued. Lady Ingram thought it "le cas" to wring her hands; which she did accordingly. Miss Mary declared she felt, for her part, she never dared venture. Amy and Louisa Eshton tittered under their breath, and looked a little frightened.

The minutes passed very slowly: fifteen were counted before the library-door again opened. Miss Ingram returned to us through the arch.

Would she laugh? Would she take it as a joke?—All eyes met her with a glance of eager curiosity, and she met all eyes with one of rebuff and coldness: she looked neither flurried nor merry; she walked stiffly to her seat, and took it in silence.

"Well, Blanche?" said Lord Ingram.

"What did she say, sister?" asked Mary.

"What did you think? How do you feel? Is she a real fortune-teller?" demanded the Misses Eshton.

"Now, now, good people," returned Miss Ingram, "don't press upon me. Really your organs of wonder and credulity are easily excited: you seem by the importance you all—my good mama included—ascibe to this mat-

ter—absolutely to believe we have a genuine witch in the house, who is in close alliance with the old gentleman. I have seen a gipsy-vagabond; she has practised in hackneyed fashion the science of palmistry, and told me what such people usually tell. My whim is gratified; and now I think Mr. Eshton will do well to put the hag in the stocks to-morrow morning, as he threatened.”

Miss Ingram took a book, leant back in her chair, and so declined further conversation. I watched her for nearly half an hour: during all that time she never turned a page, and her face grew momentarily darker, more dissatisfied, and more sourly expressive of disappointment. She had obviously not heard anything to her advantage; and it seemed to me, from her prolonged fit of gloom and taciturnity, that she herself, notwithstanding her professed indifference, attached undue importance to whatever revelations had been made her.

Meantime, Mary Ingram, Amy and Louisa Eshton, declared they dared not go alone; and yet they all wished to go. A negociation was opened through the medium of the ambassador, Sam; and after much pacing to and fro, till, I think, the said Sam's calves must have ached with the exercise, permission was

at last, with great difficulty, extorted from the rigorous Sybil, for the three to wait upon her in a body.

Their visit was not so still as Miss Ingram's had been: we heard hysterical giggling and little shrieks proceeding from the library; and at the end of about twenty minutes they burst the door open, and came running across the hall, as if they were half-scared out of their wits.

"I'm sure she is something not right!" they cried, one and all. "She told us such things! She knows all about us!" and they sank breathless into the various seats the gentlemen hastened to bring them.

Pressed for further explanation, they declared she had told them of things they had said and done when they were mere children; described books and ornaments they had in their boudoirs at home: keepsakes that different relations had presented to them. They affirmed that she had even divined their thoughts, and had whispered in the ear of each the name of the person she liked best in the world, and informed them of what they most wished for.

Here the gentlemen interposed with earnest

petitions to be further enlightened on these two last-named points; but they got only blushes, ejaculations, tremors and titters, in return for their importunity. The matrons, meantime, offered vinaigrettes and wielded fans; and again and again reiterated the expression of their concern that their warning had not been taken in time; and the elder gentlemen laughed, and the younger urged their services on the agitated fair ones.

In the midst of the tumult, and while my eyes and ears were fully engaged in the scene before me, I heard a hem close at my elbow: I turned, and saw Sam.

“If you please, Miss, the gipsy declares that there is another young single lady in the room who has not been to her yet, and she swears she will not go till she has seen all. I thought it must be you: there is no one else for it. What shall I tell her?”

“Oh, I will go by all means,” I answered; and I was glad of the unexpected opportunity to gratify my much excited curiosity. I slipped out of the room, unobserved by any eye—for the company were gathered in one mass about the trembling trio just returned—and I closed the door quietly behind me.

“If you like, Miss,” said Sam, “I’ll wait in the hall for you ; and if she frightens you, just call and I’ll come in.”

“No, Sam, return to the kitchen : I am not in the least afraid.” Nor was I ; but I was a good deal interested and excited.

CHAPTER IV.

THE Library looked tranquil enough as I entered it, and the Sybil—if Sybil she were, was seated snugly enough in an easy chair at the chimney-corner. She had on a red cloak and a black bonnet; or rather, a broad-brimmed gipsy hat, tied down with a striped handkerchief under her chin. An extinguished candle stood on the table; she was bending over the fire, and seemed reading in a little black book, like a prayer-book, by the light of the blaze: she muttered the words to herself, as most old women do, while she read; she did not desist immediately on my entrance: it appeared she wished to finish a paragraph.

I stood on the rug and warmed my hands, which were rather cold with sitting at a distance from the drawing-room fire. I felt now as composed as ever I did in my life: there was nothing indeed in the gipsy's appearance to

trouble one's calm. She shut her book and slowly looked up; her hat-brim partially shaded her face, yet I could see, as she raised it, that it was a strange one. It looked all brown and black: elf-locks bristled out from beneath a white band which passed under her chin, and came half over her cheeks or rather jaws; her eye confronted me at once, with a bold and direct gaze.

"Well, and you want your fortune told?" she said in a voice as decided as her glance, as harsh as her features.

"I don't care about it, mother; you may please yourself: but I ought to warn you, I have no faith."

"It's like your impudence to say so: I expected it of you; I heard it in your step as you crossed the threshold."

"Did you? You've a quick ear."

"I have; and a quick eye, and a quick brain."

"You need them all in your trade."

"I do; especially when I've customers like you to deal with. Why don't you tremble?"

"I'm not cold."

"Why don't you turn pale?"

"I am not sick."

"Why don't you consult my art?"

“I’m not silly.”

The old crone “nichered” a laugh under her bonnet and bandage: she then drew out a short black pipe, and lighting it, began to smoke. Having indulged awhile in this sedative, she raised her bent body, took the pipe from her lips, and while gazing steadily at the fire, said very deliberately:—

“You are cold; you are sick; and you are silly.”

“Prove it,” I rejoined.

“I will; in few words. You are cold; because you are alone: no contact strikes the fire from you that is in you. You are sick; because the best of feelings, the highest and the sweetest given to man, keeps far away from you. You are silly; because, suffer as you may, you will not beckon it to approach; nor will you stir one step to meet it where it waits you.”

She again put her short, black pipe to her lips and renewed her smoking with vigour.

“You might say all that to almost any one who, you knew, lived as a solitary dependent in a great house.”

“I might say it to almost any one; but would it be true of almost any one?”

“In my circumstances.”

“Yes; just so, in *your* circumstances: but find me another precisely placed as you are.”

“It would be easy to find you thousands.”

“You could scarcely find me one. If you knew it, you are peculiarly situated: very near happiness; yes; within reach of it. The materials are all prepared; there only wants a movement to combine them. Chance laid them somewhat apart: let them be once approached and bliss results.”

“I don’t understand enigmas. I never could guess a riddle in my life.”

“If you wish me to speak more plainly, show me your palm.”

“And I must cross it with silver, I suppose?”

“To be sure.”

I gave her a shilling: she put it into an old stocking-foot which she took out of her pocket, and having tied it round and returned it, she told me to hold out my hand. I did. She approached her face to the palm, and pored over it without touching it.

“It is too fine;” said she. “I can make nothing of such a hand as that; almost without lines: besides, what is in a palm? Destiny is not written there.”

“I believe you,” said I.

“No;” she continued, “it is in the face: on

the forehead, about the eyes, in the eyes themselves, in the lines of the mouth. Kneel, and lift up your head."

"Ah! Now you are coming to reality," I said as I obeyed her.

"I shall begin to put some faith in you presently."

I knelt within half a yard of her. She stirred the fire, so that a ripple of light broke from the disturbed coal: the glare, however, as she sat, only threw her face into deeper shadow: mine, it illumined.

"I wonder with what feelings you came to me to-night," she said, when she had examined me awhile. "I wonder what thoughts are busy in your heart during all the hours you sit in yonder room with the fine people flitting before you like shapes in a magic-lantern: just as little sympathetic communion passing between you and them, as if they were really mere shadows of human forms and not the actual substance."

"I feel tired often, sleepy sometimes; but seldom sad."

"Then you have some secret hope to buoy you up and please you with whispers of the future?"

"Not I. The utmost I hope is, to save

money enough out of my earnings to set up a school some day in a little house rented by myself."

"A mean nutriment for the spirit to exist on: and sitting in that window-seat (you see I know your habits)—"

"You have learned them from the servants."

"Ah! You think yourself sharp. Well—perhaps I have: to speak truth, I have an acquaintance with one of them—Mrs. Poole—"

I started to my feet when I heard the name.

"You have—have you?" thought I; "there is diablerie in the business after all, then!"

"Don't be alarmed," continued the strange being; "she's a safe hand, is Mrs. Poole: close and quiet: any one may repose confidence in her. But, as I was saying: sitting in that window-seat, do you think of nothing but your future school? Have you no present interest in any of the company who occupy the sofas and chairs before you? Is there not one face you study? One figure whose movements you follow with, at least, curiosity?"

"I like to observe all the faces, and all the figures."

"But do you never single one from the rest—or it may be, two?"

"I do frequently; when the gestures or

looks of a pair seem telling a tale: it amuses me to watch them."

"What tale do you like best to hear?"

"Oh, I have not much choice! They generally run on the same theme—courtship; and promise to end in the same catastrophe—marriage."

"And do you like that monotonous theme?"

"Positively I don't care about it: it is nothing to me."

"Nothing to you? When a lady, young and full of life and health, charming with beauty and endowed with the gifts of rank and fortune, sits and smiles in the eyes of a gentleman you—"

"I what?"

"You know—and, perhaps, think well of."

"I don't know the gentlemen here. I have scarcely interchanged a syllable with one of them; and as to thinking well of them, I consider some respectable and stately, and middle-aged, and others young, dashing, handsome and lively: but certainly they are all at liberty to be the recipients of whose smiles they please, without my feeling disposed to consider the transaction of any moment to me."

"You don't know the gentlemen here? You have not exchanged a syllable with one

of them? Will you say that of the master of the house?"

"He is not at home."

"A profound remark! A most ingenious quibble! He went to Millcote this morning, and will be back here to-night, or to-morrow: does that circumstance exclude him from the list of your acquaintance—blot him, as it were, out of existence?"

"No: but I can scarcely see what Mr. Rochester has to do with the theme you had introduced."

"I was talking of ladies smiling in the eyes of gentlemen; and of late so many smiles have been shed into Mr. Rochester's eyes that they overflow like two cups filled above the brim: have you never remarked that?"

"Mr. Rochester has a right to enjoy the society of his guests."

"No question about his right: but have you never observed that, of all the tales told here about matrimony, Mr. Rochester has been favoured with the most lively and the most continuous?"

"The eagerness of a listener quickens the tongue of a narrator." I said this rather to myself than to the gipsy; whose strange talk,

voice, manner had by this time wrapped me in a kind of dream. One unexpected sentence came from her lips after another, till I got involved in a web of mystification; and wondered what unseen spirit had been sitting for weeks by my heart, watching its workings, and taking record of every pulse.

“Eagerness of a listener!” repeated she: “yes; Mr. Rochester has sat by the hour, his ear inclined to the fascinating lips that took such delight in their task of communicating; and Mr. Rochester was so willing to receive, and looked so grateful for the pastime given him: you have noticed this?”

“Grateful! I cannot remember detecting gratitude in his face.”

“Detecting! You have analyzed, then. And what did you detect, if not gratitude?”

I said nothing.

“You have seen love: have you not?—and, looking forward, you have seen him married, and beheld his bride happy?”

“Humph! Not exactly. Your witch’s skill is rather at fault sometimes.”

“What the devil have you seen, then?”

“Never mind: I came here to inquire, not to confess. Is it known that Mr. Rochester is to be married?”

“ Yes ; and to the beautiful Miss Ingram.”

“ Shortly ?”

“ Appearances would warrant that conclusion ; and, no doubt (though, with an audacity that wants chastising out of you, you seem to question it), they will be a superlatively happy pair. He must love such a handsome, noble, witty, accomplished lady ; and probably she loves him : or, if not his person, at least his purse. I know she considers the Rochester estate eligible to the last degree ; though (God pardon me !) I told her something on that point about an hour ago, which made her look wondrous grave : the corners of her mouth fell half an inch. I would advise her black a-vised suitor to look out : if another comes, with a longer or clearer rent-roll,—he ’s dished——”

“ But, mother, I did not come to hear Mr. Rochester’s fortune : I came to hear my own ; and you have told me nothing of it.”

“ Your fortune is yet doubtful : when I examined your face, one trait contradicted another. Chance has meted you a measure of happiness : that I know. I knew it before I came here this evening. She has laid it carefully on one side for you. I saw her do it. It depends on yourself to stretch out your hand, and take it up : but whether you will do so, is

the problem I study. Kneel again on the rug."

"Don't keep me long; the fire scorches me."

I knelt. She did not stoop towards me, but only gazed, leaning back in her chair. She began muttering:

"The flame flickers in the eye; the eye shines like dew; it looks soft and full of feeling; it smiles at my jargon: it is susceptible; impression follows impression through its clear sphere; when it ceases to smile, it is sad; an unconscious lassitude weighs on the lid: that signifies melancholy resulting from loneliness. It turns from me; it will not suffer farther scrutiny; it seems to deny, by a mocking glance, the truth of the discoveries I have already made,—to disown the charge both of sensibility and chagrin: its pride and reserve only confirm me in my opinion. The eye is favourable.

"As to the mouth, it delights at times in laughter: it is disposed to impart all that the brain conceives; though I dare say it would be silent on much the heart experiences. Mobile and flexible, it was never intended to be compressed in the eternal silence of solitude: it is a mouth which should speak much and smile often, and have human affection

for its interlocutor. That feature, too, is propitious.

“ I see no enemy to a fortunate issue but in the brow ; and that brow professes to say,— ‘ I can live alone, if self-respect and circumstances require me so to do. I need not sell my soul to buy bliss. I have an inward treasure, born with me, which can keep me alive if all extraneous delights should be withheld ; or offered only at a price I cannot afford to give.’ The forehead declares, ‘ Reason sits firm and holds the reins, and she will not let the feelings burst away and hurry her to wild chasms. The passions may rage furiously, like true heathens, as they are ; and the desires may imagine all sorts of vain things : but judgment shall still have the last word in every argument, and the casting vote in every decision. Strong wind, earthquake, shock, and fire may pass by : I shall follow the guiding but of that still small voice which interprets the dictates of conscience.’

“ Well said, forehead ; your declaration shall be respected. I have formed my plans—right plans I deem them—and in them I have attended to the claims of conscience, the counsels of reason. I know how soon youth would fade and bloom perish, if, in the cup of

bliss offered, but one dreg of shame, or one flavour of remorse were detected; and I do not want sacrifice, sorrow, dissolution—such is not my taste. I wish to foster, not to blight—to earn gratitude, not to wring tears of blood—no, nor of brine: my harvest must be in smiles, in endearments, in sweet.* That will do. I think I rave in a kind of exquisite delirium. I should wish now to protract this moment *ad infinitum*; but I dare not. So far I have governed myself thoroughly. I have acted as I inwardly swore I would act; but farther might try me beyond my strength. Rise, Miss Eyre: leave me; ‘the play is played out.’”

Where was I? Did I wake or sleep? Had I been dreaming? Did I dream still? The old woman’s voice had changed: her accent, her gesture, and all, were familiar to me as my own face in the glass—as the speech of my own tongue. I got up, but did not go. I looked; I stirred the fire, and I looked again: but she drew her bonnet and her bandage closer about her face, and again beckoned me to depart. The flame illuminated her hand stretched out: roused now, and on the alert for discoveries, I at once noticed that hand. It was no more the withered limb of eld than my own: it was

a rounded supple member, with smooth fingers, symmetrically turned; a broad ring flashed on the little finger, and stooping forward, I looked at it, and saw a gem I had seen a hundred times before. Again I looked at the face; which was no longer turned from me—on the contrary, the bonnet was doffed, the bandage displaced, the head advanced.

“Well, Jane, do you know me?” asked the familiar voice.

“Only take off the red cloak, sir, and then ——”

“But the string is in a knot—help me.”

“Break it, sir.”

“There, then—‘Off, ye lendings!’” And Mr. Rochester stepped out of his disguise.

“Now, sir, what a strange idea!”

“But well carried out, eh? Don’t you think so?”

“With the ladies you must have managed well.”

“But not with you?”

“You did not act the character of a gipsy with me.”

“What character did I act? My own?”

“No; some unaccountable one. In short, I believe you have been trying to draw me out—or in: you have been talking nonsense to make me talk nonsense. It is scarcely fair, sir.”

“Do you forgive me, Jane?”

“I cannot tell till I have thought it all over. If, on reflection, I find I have fallen into no great absurdity, I shall try to forgive you: but it was not right.”

“Oh! you have been very correct—very careful, very sensible.”

I reflected, and thought, on the whole, I had. It was a comfort: but, indeed, I had been on my guard almost from the beginning of the interview. Something of masquerade I suspected. I knew gipsies and fortune-tellers did not express themselves as this seeming old woman had expressed herself: besides, I had noted her feigned voice, her anxiety to conceal her features. But my mind had been running on Grace Poole—that living enigma, that mystery of mysteries, as I considered her: I had never thought of Mr Rochester.

“Well,” said he, “what are you musing about? What does that grave smile [signify?”

“Wonder and self-congratulation, sir. I have your permission to retire now, I suppose?”

“No: stay a moment; and tell me what the people in the drawing-room yonder are doing.”

“Discussing the gipsy, I daresay.”

“Sit down, sit down!—Let me hear what they said about me.”

“I had better not stay long, sir: it must be near eleven o’clock. Oh! are you aware, Mr. Rochester, that a stranger has arrived here since you left this morning?”

“A stranger!—no: who can it be? I expected no one: is he gone?”

“No: he said he had known you long, and that he could take the liberty of installing himself here till you returned.”

“The devil he did! Did he give his name?”

“His name is Mason, sir; and he comes from the West Indies: from Spanish Town, in Jamaica, I think.”

Mr. Rochester was standing near me: he had taken my hand, as if to lead me to a chair. As I spoke, he gave my wrist a convulsive grip; the smile on his lips froze: apparently a spasm caught his breath,

“Mason!—the West Indies!” he said, in the tone one might fancy a speaking automaton to enounce its single words; “Mason!—the West Indies!” he reiterated; and he went over the syllables three times, growing, in the intervals of speaking, whiter than ashes: he hardly seemed to know what he was doing.

“Do you feel ill, sir?” I inquired.

“Jane, I’ve got a blow;—I’ve got a blow, Jane!” he staggered.

“Oh!—lean on me, sir.”

“Jane, you offered me your shoulder once before; let me have it now.”

“Yes, sir, yes; and my arm.”

He sat down, and made me sit beside him. Holding my hand in both his own, he chafed it; gazing on me, at the same time, with the most troubled and dreary look.

“My little friend!” said he, “I wish I were in a quiet island with only you; and trouble, and danger, and hideous recollections removed from me,”

“Can I help you, sir?—I’d give my life to serve you.”

“Jane, if aid is wanted, I’ll seek it at your hands: I promise you that.”

“Thank you, sir: tell me what to do,—I’ll try, at least, to do it.”

“Fetch me now, Jane, a glass of wine from the dining-room: they will be at supper there; and tell me if Mason is with them, and what he is doing.”

I went. I found all the party in the dining-room at supper, as Mr. Rochester had said: they were not seated at table,—the supper was

arranged on the sideboard; each had taken what he chose, and they stood about here and there in groups, their plates and glasses in their hands. Every one seemed in high glee; laughter and conversation were general and animated. Mr. Mason stood near the fire, talking to Colonel and Mrs. Dent, and appeared as merry as any of them. I filled a wine-glass (I saw Miss Ingram watch me frowningly as I did so: she thought I was taking a liberty, I dare say), and I returned to the library.

Mr. Rochester's extreme pallor had disappeared, and he looked once more firm and stern. He took the glass from my hand.

"Here is to your health, ministrant spirit!" he said: he swallowed the contents and returned it to me. "What are they doing, Jane?"

"Laughing and talking, sir."

"They don't look grave and mysterious, as if they had heard something strange?"

"Not at all:—they are full of jests and gaiety."

"And Mason?"

"He was laughing too."

"If all these people came in a body and spit at me, what would you do, Jane?"

“Turn them out of the room, sir, if I could.”

He half smiled. “But if I were to go to them, and they only looked at me coldly, and whispered sneeringly amongst each other, and then dropt off and left me one by one, what then? Would you go with them?”

“I rather think not, sir: I should have more pleasure in staying with you.”

“To comfort me.”

“Yes, sir, to comfort you, as well as I could.”

“And if they laid you under a ban for adhering to me?”

“I, probably, should know nothing about their ban; and if I did, I should care nothing about it.”

“Then, you could dare censure for my sake?”

“I could dare it for the sake of any friend who deserved my adherence; as you, I am sure do.”

“Go back now into the room; step quietly up to Mason, and whisper in his ear that Mr. Rochester is come and wishes to see him: show him in here, and then leave me.”

“Yes, sir.”

I did his behest. The company all stared at me as I passed straight among them. I

sought Mr. Mason, delivered the message, and preceded him from the room: I ushered him into the library, and then I went up stairs.

At a late hour, after I had been in bed some time, I heard the visitors repair to their chambers: I distinguished Mr. Rochester's voice, and heard him say, "This way, Mason; this is your room."

He spoke cheerfully: the gay tones set my heart at ease. I was soon asleep.

CHAPTER V.

I HAD forgotten to draw my curtain, which I usually did; and also to let down my window-blind. The consequence was, that when the moon, which was full and bright, (for the night was fine) came in her course to that space in the sky opposite my casement, and looked in at me through the unveiled panes, her glorious gaze roused me. Awaking in the dead of night, I opened my eyes on her disk—silver-white and crystal-clear. It was beautiful, but too solemn: I half rose, and stretched my arm to draw the curtain.

Good God! What a cry!

The night—its silence—its rest, was rent in twain by a savage, a sharp, a shrilly sound that ran from end to end of Thornfield-Hall.

My pulse stopped: my heart stood still; my stretched arm was paralyzed. The cry died, and was not renewed. Indeed, whatever

being uttered that fearful shriek could not soon repeat it: not the widest-winged condor on the Andes could, twice in succession, send out such a yell from the cloud shrouding his eyry. The thing delivering such utterance must rest ere it could repeat the effort.

It came out of the third story; for it passed overhead. And overhead—yes, in the room just above my chamber-ceiling—I now heard a struggle: a deadly one it seemed from the noise; and a half-smothered voice shouted:—

“Help! help! help;” three times rapidly.

“Will no one come?” it cried; and then while the staggering and stamping went on wildly, I distinguished through plank and plaster:—

“Rochester! Rochester! For God’s sake, Come!”

A chamber-door opened: some one ran, or rushed, along the gallery. Another step stamped on the flooring above, and something fell; and there was silence.

I had put on some clothes, though horror shook all my limbs: I issued from my apartment. The sleepers were all aroused: ejaculations, terrified murmurs sounded in every room; door after door unclosed; one looked out and another looked out; the gallery filled.

Gentlemen and ladies alike had quitted their beds; and "Oh! What is it?"—"Who is hurt?"—"What has happened?"—"Fetch a light!"—"Is it fire?"—"Are there robbers?"—"Where shall we run?" was demanded confusedly on all hands. But for the moonlight they would have been in complete darkness. They ran to and fro; they crowded together: some sobbed, some stumbled: the confusion was inextricable.

"Where the devil is Rochester?" cried Colonel Dent. "I cannot find him in his bed."

"Here! here!" was shouted in return. "Be composed, all of you: I'm coming."

And the door at the end of the gallery opened, and Mr. Rochester advanced with a candle: he had just descended from the upper story. One of the ladies ran to him directly; she seized his arm: it was Miss Ingram.

"What awful event has taken place?" said she. "Speak! let us know the worst at once!"

"But don't pull me down or strangle me," he replied: for the Misses Eshton were clinging about him now; and the two dowagers, in vast white wrappers, were bearing down on him like ships in full sail.

“All’s right!—all’s right!” he cried. “It’s a mere rehearsal of much ado about nothing. Ladies, keep off; or I shall wax dangerous.”

And dangerous he looked: his black eyes darted sparks. Calming himself by an effort, he added:

“A servant has had the nightmare; that is all. She’s an excitable, nervous person: she construed her dream into an apparition, or something of that sort, no doubt; and has taken a fit with fright. Now, then, I must see you all back into your rooms; for, till the house is settled, she cannot be looked after. Gentlemen, have the goodness to set the ladies the example. Miss Ingram, I am sure you will not fail in evincing superiority to idle terrors. Amy and Louisa, return to your nests like a pair of doves, as you are. Mesdames” (to the dowagers) “you will take cold to a dead certainty, if you stay in this chill gallery any longer.”

And so, by dint of alternate coaxing and commanding, he contrived to get them all once more enclosed in their separate dormitories. I did not wait to be ordered back to mine; but retreated unnoticed: as unnoticed I had left it.

Not, however, to go to bed: on the contrary,

I began and dressed myself carefully. The sounds I had heard after the scream, and the words that had been uttered, had probably been heard only by me; for they had proceeded from the room above mine: but they assured me that it was not a servant's dream which had thus struck horror through the house; and that the explanation Mr. Rochester had given was merely an invention framed to pacify his guests. I dressed, then, to be ready for emergencies. When dressed, I sat a long time by the window, looking out over the silent grounds and silvered fields, and waiting for I knew not what. It seemed to me that some event must follow the strange cry, struggle, and call.

No: stillness returned: each murmur and movement ceased gradually, and in about an hour Thornfield Hall was again as hushed as a desert. It seemed that sleep and night had resumed their empire. Meantime the moon declined: she was about to set. Not liking to sit in the cold and darkness, I thought I would lie down on my bed, dressed as I was. I left the window, and moved with little noise across the carpet; as I stooped to take off my shoes, a cautious hand tapped low at the door.

“Am I wanted?” I asked.

“Are you up?” asked the voice I expected to hear, viz., my master’s.

“Yes, sir.”

“And dressed?”

“Yes.”

“Come out, then, quietly.”

I obeyed. Mr. Rochester stood in the gallery, holding a light.

“I want you,” he said: “come this way: take your time, and make no noise.”

My slippers were thin: I could walk the matted floor as softly as a cat. He glided up the gallery and up the stairs, and stopped in the dark, low corridor of the fateful third story: I had followed and stood at his side.

“Have you a sponge in your room?” he asked in a whisper.

“Yes, sir.”

“Have you any salts—volatile salts?”

“Yes.”

“Go back and fetch both.”

I returned, sought the sponge on the washstand, the salts in my drawer, and once more retraced my steps. He still waited; he held a key in his hand: approaching one of the small, black doors, he put it in the lock; he paused and addressed me again.

“You don’t turn sick at the sight of blood?”

“I think I shall not: I have never been tried yet.”

I felt a thrill while I answered him; but no coldness, and no faintness.

“Just give me your hand;” he said, “it will not do to risk a fainting fit.”

I put my fingers into his. “Warm and steady,” was his remark: he turned the key and opened the door.

I saw a room I remembered to have seen before: the day Mrs. Fairfax showed me over the house: it was hung with tapestry; but the tapestry was now looped up in one part, and there was a door apparent, which had then been concealed. This door was open; a light shone out of the room within: I heard thence a snarling, snatching sound, almost like a dog quarrelling. Mr. Rochester, putting down his candle, said to me, “wait a minute,” and he went forward to the inner apartment. A shout of laughter greeted his entrance; noisy at first, and terminating in Grace Poole’s own goblin ha! ha! *She* then was there. He made some sort of arrangement, without speaking; though I heard a low voice address him: he came out and closed the door behind him.

“Here, Jane!” he said; and I walked round to the other side of a large bed, which with its drawn curtains concealed a considerable portion of the chamber. An easy-chair was near the bed-head: a man sat in it, dressed with the exception of his coat; he was still; his head leant back; his eyes were closed. Mr. Rochester held the candle over him; I recognized in his pale and seemingly lifeless face—the stranger, Mason: I saw too that his linen on one side, and one arm, was almost soaked in blood.

“Hold the candle,” said Mr. Rochester, and I took it; he fetched a basin of water from the washstand: “hold that,” said he. I obeyed. He took the sponge, dipped it in and moistened the corpse-like face: he asked for my smelling-bottle, and applied it to the nostrils. Mr. Mason shortly unclosed his eyes; he groaned. Mr. Rochester opened the shirt of the wounded man, whose arm and shoulder were bandaged: he sponged away blood, trickling fast down.

“Is there immediate danger?” murmured Mr. Mason.

“Pooh! No—a mere scratch. Don’t be so overcome, man: bear up! I’ll fetch a surgeon for you now, myself: you’ll be able to

be removed by morning, I hope. Jane—" he continued.

"Sir?"

"I shall have to leave you in this room with this gentleman, for an hour, or perhaps two hours; you will sponge the blood as I do when it returns: if he feels faint, you will put the glass of water on that stand, to his lips, and your salts to his nose. You will not speak to him on any pretext—and—Richard—it will be at the peril of your life you speak to her: open your lips—agitate yourself—and I'll not answer for the consequences."

Again the poor man groaned: he looked as if he dared not move: fear, either of death or of something else, appeared almost to paralyze him. Mr. Rochester put the now bloody sponge into my hand, and I proceeded to use it as he had done. He watched me a second, then saying, "remember!—No conversation," he left the room. I experienced a strange feeling as the key grated in the lock, and the sound of his retreating step ceased to be heard.

Here then I was in the third story, fastened into one of its mystic cells; night around me; a pale and bloody spectacle under my eyes and hands; a murderess hardly separated from me

by a single door: yes—that was appalling—the rest I could bear; but I shuddered at the thought of Grace Poole bursting out upon me.

I must keep to my post, however. I must watch this ghastly countenance—these blue, still lips forbidden to unclosethese eyes now shut, now opening, now wandering through the room, now fixing on me, and ever glazed with the dulness of horror. I must dip my hand again and again in the basin of blood and water, and wipe away the trickling gore. I must see the light of the unsnuffed candle wane on my employment; the shadows darken on the wrought, antique tapestry round me, and grow black under the hangings of the vast old bed, and quiver strangely over the doors of a great cabinet opposite—whose front, divided into twelve panels, bore in grim design, the heads of the twelve apostles, each inclosed in its separate panel as in a frame; while above them at the top rose an ebon crucifix and a dying Christ.

According as the shifting obscurity and flickering gleam hovered here or glanced there, it was now the bearded physician, Luke, that bent his brow; now St. John's long hair that waved; and anon the devilish face of Judas, that grew out of the panel and seemed

gathering life and threatening a revelation of the arch-traitor—of Satan himself—in his subordinate's form.

Amidst all this, I had to listen as well as watch : to listen for the movements of the wild beast or the fiend in yonder side den. But since Mr. Rochester's visit it seemed spell-bound : all the night I heard but three sounds at three long intervals,—a step, creak, a momentary renewal of the snarling, canine noise, and a deep, human groan.

Then my own thoughts worried me. What crime was this, that lived incarnate in this sequestered mansion, and could neither be expelled nor subdued by the owner?—What mystery, that broke out, now in fire and now in blood, at the deadest hours of night?—What creature was it, that, masked in an ordinary woman's face and shape, uttered the voice, now of a mocking demon, and anon of a carrion-seeking bird of prey?

And this man I bent over—this commonplace, quiet stranger—how had he become involved in the web of horror? and why had the Fury flown at him? What made him seek this quarter of the house at an untimely season, when he should have been asleep in bed? I had heard Mr. Rochester assign him an apart-

ment below—what brought him here? And why, now, was he so tame under the violence or treachery done him? Why did he so quietly submit to the concealment Mr. Rochester enforced? Why *did* Mr. Rochester enforce this concealment? His guest had been outraged, his own life on a former occasion had been hideously plotted against; and both attempts he smothered in secrecy and sunk in oblivion! Lastly, I saw Mr. Mason was submissive to Mr. Rochester; that the impetuous will of the latter held complete sway over the inertness of the former: the few words which had passed between them assured me of this. It was evident that in their former intercourse, the passive disposition of the one had been habitually influenced by the active energy of the other: whence then had arisen Mr. Rochester's dismay when he heard of Mr. Mason's arrival? Why had the mere name of this unresisting individual—whom his word now sufficed to control like a child—fallen on him, a few hours since, as a thunderbolt might fall on an oak?

Oh! I could not forget his look and his paleness when he whispered: "Jane, I have got a blow—I have got a blow, Jane." I could not forget how the arm had trembled

which he rested on my shoulder: and it was no light matter which could thus bow the resolute spirit and thrill the vigorous frame of Fairfax Rochester.

“When will he come? When will he come?” I cried inwardly, as the night lingered and lingered—as my bleeding patient drooped, moaned, sickened: and neither day nor aid arrived. I had, again and again, held the water to Mason’s white lips; again and again offered him the stimulating salts: my efforts seemed ineffectual: either bodily or mental suffering, or loss of blood, or all three combined, were fast prostrating his strength. He moaned so, and looked so weak, wild and lost, I feared he was dying; and I might not even speak to him!

The candle, wasted at last, went out; as it expired, I perceived streaks of grey light edging the window curtains: dawn was then approaching. Presently I heard Pilot bark far below, out of his distant kennel in the courtyard: hope revived. Nor was it unwarranted: in five minutes more the grating key, the yielding lock, warned me my watch was relieved. It could not have lasted more than two hours: many a week has seemed shorter.

Mr. Rochester entered, and with him the surgeon he had been to fetch.

“Now, Carter, be on the alert;” he said to this last: “I give you but half an hour for dressing the wound, fastening the bandages, getting the patient down stairs and all.”

“But is he fit to move, sir?”

“No doubt of it; it is nothing serious: he is nervous, his spirits must be kept up. Come, set to work.”

Mr. Rochester drew back the thick curtain, drew up the holland blind, let in all the daylight he could; and I was surprised and cheered to see how far dawn was advanced: what rosy streaks were beginning to brighten the East. Then he approached Mason, whom the surgeon was already handling.

“Now, my good fellow, how are you?” he asked.

“She ’s done for me, I fear,” was the faint reply.

“Not a whit!—courage! This day fortnight you ’ll hardly be a pin the worse of it: you ’ve lost a little blood; that ’s all. Carter, assure him there ’s no danger.”

“I can do that conscientiously,” said Carter, who had now undone the bandages; “only I wish I could have got here sooner: he would

not have bled so much—but how is this? The flesh on the shoulder is torn as well as cut? This wound was not done with a knife: there have been teeth here?”

“She bit me,” he murmured. “She worried me like a tigress, when Rochester got the knife from her.”

“You should not have yielded: you should have grappled with her at once,” said Mr. Rochester.

“But under such circumstances, what could one do?” returned Mason. “Oh it was frightful!” he added, shuddering. “And I did not expect it: she looked so quiet at first.”

“I warned you,” was his friend’s answer; “I said—be on your guard when you go near her. Besides, you might have waited till to-morrow and had me with you: it was mere folly to attempt the interview to-night, and alone.”

“I thought I could have done some good.”

“You thought! you thought! Yes; it makes me impatient to hear you: but, however, you have suffered, and are likely to suffer enough for not taking my advice; so I’ll say no more. Carter—hurry! hurry! The sun will soon rise, and I must have him off.”

“Directly, sir; the shoulder is just ban-

daged. I must look to this other wound in the arm : she has had her teeth here too, I think."

"She sucked the blood : she said she'd drain my heart," said Mason.

I saw Mr. Rochester shudder : a singularly marked expression of disgust, horror, hatred warped his countenance almost to distortion ; but he only said :—

"Come, be silent, Richard, and never mind her gibberish : don't repeat it."

"I wish I could forget it," was the answer.

"You will when you are out of the country : when you get back to Spanish Town you may think of her as dead and buried—or rather you need not think of her at all."

"Impossible to forget this night!"

"It is not impossible : have some energy, man. You thought you were as dead as a herring two hours since, and you are all alive and talking now. There!—Carter has done with you or nearly so ; I'll make you decent in a trice. Jane," (he turned to me for the first time since his re-entrance) "take this key : go down into my bed-room, and walk straight forward into my dressing-room ; open the top drawer of the wardrobe and take out a clean shirt and neck-handkerchief ; bring them here : and be nimble."

I went; sought the repository he had mentioned, found the articles named, and returned with them.

“Now,” said he, “go to the other side of the bed while I order his toilet; but don’t leave the room: you may be wanted again.”

I retired as directed.

“Was anybody stirring below when you went down, Jane?” enquired Mr. Rochester, presently.

“No, sir; all was very still.”

“We shall get you off cannily, Dick: and it will be better, both for your sake, and for that of the poor creature in yonder. I have striven long to avoid exposure, and I should not like it to come at last. Here, Carter, help him on with his waistcoat. Where did you leave your furred cloak? You can’t travel a mile without that, I know, in this damned cold climate. In your room?—Jane, run down to Mr. Mason’s room,—the one next mine,—and fetch a cloak you will see there.”

Again I ran, and again returned, bearing an immense mantle, lined and edged with fur.

“Now I’ve another errand for you,” said my untiring master; “you must away to my room again. What a mercy you are shod

with velvet, Jane!—a clod-hopping messenger would never do at this juncture. You must open the middle drawer of my toilet-table and take out a little phial and a little glass you will find there,—quick!”

I flew thither and back, bringing the desired vessels.

“That’s well! Now, doctor, I shall take the liberty of administering a dose myself; on my own responsibility. I got this cordial at Rome, of an Italian charlatan,—a fellow you would have kicked, Carter. It is not a thing to be used indiscriminately, but it is good upon occasion: as now for instance. Jane, a little water.”

He held out the tiny glass, and I half filled it from the water bottle on the wash-stand.

“That will do:—now wet the lip of the phial.”

I did so: he measured twelve drops of a crimson liquid, and presented it to Mason.

“Drink, Richard: it will give you the heart you lack, for an hour or so.”

“But will it hurt me?—is it inflammatory?”

“Drink! drink! drink!”

Mr. Mason obeyed, because it was evidently useless to resist. He was dressed now: he still looked pale, but he was no longer gory

and sullied. Mr. Rochester let him sit three minutes after he had swallowed the liquid ; he then took his arm :—

“ Now I am sure you can get on your feet,” he said ;—“ try.”

The patient rose.

“ Carter, take him under the other shoulder. Be of good cheer, Richard ; step out :—that’s it !”

“ I do feel better,” remarked Mr. Mason.

“ I am sure you do. Now, Jane, trip on before us away to the backstairs ; unbolt the side passage door, and tell the driver of the post-chaise you will see in the yard—or just outside, for I told him not to drive his rattling wheels over the pavement—to be ready ; we are coming : and Jane, if any one is about, come to the foot of the stairs and hem.”

It was by this time half-past five, and the sun was on the point of rising ; but I found the kitchen still dark and silent. The side-passage door was fastened ; I opened it with as little noise as possible : all the yard was quiet ; but the gates stood wide open, and there was a post-chaise, with horses ready harnessed, and driver seated on the box, stationed outside. I approached him, and said the gentlemen were coming ; he nodded : then I looked carefully

round and listened. The stillness of early morning slumbered everywhere; the curtains were yet drawn over the servants' chamber windows; little birds were just twittering in the blossom-blanch'd orchard trees, whose boughs drooped like white garlands over the wall enclosing one side of the yard; the carriage horses stamped from time to time in their closed stables: all else was still.

The gentlemen now appeared. Mason, supported by Mr. Rochester and the surgeon, seemed to walk with tolerable ease: they assisted him into the chaise; Carter followed.

"Take care of him," said Mr. Rochester to the latter, "and keep him at your house till he is quite well: I shall ride over in a day or two to see how he gets on. Richard, how is it with you?"

"The fresh air revives me, Fairfax."

"Leave the window open on his side, Carter; there is no wind—good-bye, Dick."

"Fairfax ——"

"Well, what is it?"

"Let her be taken care of; let her be treated as tenderly as may be: let her——" he stopped and burst into tears.

"I do my best; and have done it, and will

do it," was the answer : he shut up the chaise door, and the vehicle drove away.

" Yet would to God there was an end of all this!" added Mr. Rochester, as he closed and barred the heavy yard-gates. This done, he moved with slow step and abstracted air, towards a door in the wall bordering the orchard. I, supposing he had done with me, prepared to return to the house ; again, however, I heard him call " Jane!" He had opened the portal and stood at it, waiting for me.

" Come where there is some freshness, for a few moments," he said ; " that house is a mere dungeon : don't you feel it so?"

" It seems to me a splendid mansion, sir."

" The glamour of inexperience is over your eyes," he answered ; " and you see it through a charmed medium : you cannot discern that the gilding is slime and the silk draperies cobwebs ; that the marble is sordid slate, and the polished woods mere refuse chips and scaly bark. Now *here* (he pointed to the leafy enclosure we had entered) all is real, sweet, and pure."

He strayed down a walk edged with box ; with apple trees, pear trees, and cherry trees on one side, and a border on the other, full of

all sorts of old-fashioned flowers, stocks, sweet-williams, primroses, pansies, mingled with southernwood, sweet-briar, and various fragrant herbs. They were fresh now as a succession of April showers and gleams, followed by a lovely spring morning, could make them: the sun was just entering the dappled east, and his light illumined the wreathed and dewy orchard trees and shone down the quiet walks under them.

“Jane, will you have a flower?”

He gathered a half-blown rose, the first on the bush, and offered it to me.

“Thank you, sir.”

“Do you like this sunrise, Jane? That sky with its high and light clouds which are sure to melt away as the day waxes warm—this placid and balmy atmosphere?”

“I do, very much.”

“You have passed a strange night, Jane.”

“Yes, sir.”

“And it has made you look pale—were you afraid when I left you alone with Mason?”

“I was afraid of some one coming out of the inner room.”

“But I had fastened the door—I had the key in my pocket: I should have been a careless shepherd if I had left a lamb—my pet

lamb—so near a wolf's-den, unguarded : you were safe."

"Will Grace Poole live here still, sir?"

"Oh, yes! don't trouble your head about her—put the thing out of your thoughts."

"Yet it seems to me your life is hardly secure whilst she stays."

"Never fear—I will take care of myself."

"Is the danger you apprehended last night gone by now, sir?"

"I cannot vouch for that till Mason is out of England : nor even then. To live, for me, Jane, is to stand on a crater-crust which may crack and spue fire any day."

"But Mr. Mason seems a man easily led. Your influence, sir, is evidently potent with him : he will never set you at defiance, or wilfully injure you."

"Oh, no! Mason will not defy me; nor knowing it, will he hurt me—but, unintentionally, he might in a moment, by one careless word, deprive me, if not of life, yet for ever of happiness."

"Tell him to be cautious, sir : let him know what you fear, and show him how to avert the danger."

He laughed sardonically, hastily took my hand, and as hastily threw it from him.

“ If I could do that, simpleton, where would the danger be? Annihilated in a moment. Ever since I have known Mason, I have only had to say to him ‘ Do that,’ and the thing has been done. But I cannot give him orders in this ‘ case : I cannot say ‘ Beware of harming me, Richard ;’ for it is imperative that I should keep him ignorant that harm to me is possible. Now you look puzzled ; and I will puzzle you farther. You are my little friend, are you not ? ”

“ I like to serve you, sir, and to obey you in all that is right. ”

“ Precisely : I see you do. I see genuine contentment in your gait and mien, your eye and face, when you are helping me and pleasing me—working for me, and with me, in, as you characteristically say, ‘ *all that is right* : ’ for if I bid you do what you thought wrong, there would be no light-footed running, no neat-handed alacrity, no lively glance and animated complexion. My friend would then turn to me, quiet and pale, and would say, ‘ No, sir ; that is impossible : I cannot do it, because it is wrong ; ’ and would become immutable as a fixed star. Well, you too have power over me, and may injure me : yet I dare not show you where I am vulnerable, lest, faithful and

friendly as you are, you should transfix me at once."

"If you have no more to fear from Mr. Mason than you have from me, sir, you are very safe."

"God grant it may be so! Here, Jane, is an arbour; sit down."

The arbour was an arch in the wall, lined with ivy; it contained a rustic seat. Mr. Rochester took it, leaving room, however, for me: but I stood before him.

"Sit," he said; "the bench is long enough for two. You don't hesitate to take a place at my side, do you? Is that wrong, Jane?"

I answered him by assuming it: to refuse would, I felt, have been unwise.

"Now, my little friend, while the sun drinks the dew—while all the flowers in this old garden awake and expand, and the birds fetch their young ones' breakfast out of the Thornfield, and the early bees do their first spell of work—I'll put a case to you; which you must endeavour to suppose your own: but first, look at me, and tell me you are at ease, and not fearing that I err in detaining you, or that you err in staying."

"No, sir; I am content."

"Well then, Jane, call to aid your fancy:—

suppose you were no longer a girl well reared and disciplined, but a wild boy, indulged from childhood upwards; imagine yourself in a remote foreign land; conceive that you there commit a capital error, no matter of what nature or from what motives, but one whose consequences must follow you through life and taint all your existence. Mind, I don't say a *crime*; I am not speaking of shedding of blood or any other guilty act, which might make the perpetrator amenable to the law: my word is *error*. The results of what you have done become in time to you utterly insupportable; you take measures to obtain relief: unusual measures, but neither unlawful nor culpable. Still you are miserable; for hope has quitted you on the very confines of life: your sun at noon darkens in an eclipse, which you feel will not leave it till the time of setting. Bitter and base associations have become the sole food of your memory: you wander here and there, seeking rest in exile; happiness in pleasure—I mean in heartless, sensual pleasure—such as dulls intellect and blights feeling. Heart-weary and soul-withered, you come home after years of voluntary banishment; you make a new acquaintance—how or where no matter: you find in this stranger much of the good

and bright qualities which you have sought for twenty years, and never before encountered; and they are all fresh, healthy, without soil and without taint. Such society revives, regenerates: you feel better days come back—higher wishes, purer feelings; you desire to recommence your life, and to spend what remains to you of days in a way more worthy of an immortal being. To attain this end, are you justified in overleaping an obstacle of custom—a mere conventional impediment, which neither your conscience sanctifies nor your judgment approves?”

He paused for an answer: and what was I to say? Oh, for some good spirit to suggest a judicious and satisfactory response! Vain aspiration! The west wind whispered in the ivy round me; but no gentle Ariel borrowed its breath as a medium of speech: the birds sang in the tree-tops; but their song, however sweet, was inarticulate.

Again Mr. Rochester propounded his query:

“Is the wandering and sinful, but now rest-seeking and repentant man, justified in daring the world’s opinion, in order to attach to him for ever, this gentle, gracious, genial stranger: thereby securing his own peace of mind and regeneration of life?”

“Sir,” I answered, “a Wanderer’s repose or a Sinner’s reformation should never depend on a fellow-creature. Men and women die; philosophers falter in wisdom, and Christians in goodness: if any one you know has suffered and erred, let him look higher than his equals for strength to amend, and solace to heal.”

“But the instrument—the instrument! God, who does the work, ordains the instrument. I have myself—I tell it you without parable—been a worldly, dissipated, restless man; and I believe I have found the instrument for my cure, in——”

He paused: the birds went on carolling, the leaves lightly rustling. I almost wondered they did not check their songs and whispers to catch the suspended revelation: but they would have had to wait many minutes—so long was the silence protracted. At last I looked up at the tardy speaker: he was looking eagerly at me.

“Little friend,” said he, in quite a changed tone—while his face changed too; losing all its softness and gravity, and becoming harsh and sarcastic,—“you have noticed, my tender penchant for Miss Ingram: don’t you think

if I married her she would regenerate me with a vengeance?"

He got up instantly, went quite to the other end of the walk, and when he came back he was humming a tune.

"Jane, Jane," said he, stopping before me, "you are quite pale with your vigils: don't you curse me for disturbing your rest?"

"Curse you? No, sir."

"Shake hands in confirmation of the word. What cold fingers! They were warmer last night when I touched them at the door of the mysterious chamber. Jane, when will you watch with me again?"

"Whenever I can be useful, sir."

"For instance, the night before I am married? I am sure I shall not be able to sleep. Will you promise to sit up with me to bear me company? To you I can talk of my lovely one; for now you have seen her and know her."

"Yes, sir."

"She's a rare one, is she not, Jane?"

"Yes, sir."

"A strapper—a real strapper, Jane: big, brown, and buxom; with hair just such as the ladies of Carthage must have had. Bless me!

there's Dent and Lynn in the stables! Go in by the shrubbery, through that wicket."

As I went one way, he went another, and I heard him in the yard, saying cheeringly:—

"Mason got the start of you all this morning; he was gone before sunrise: I rose at four to see him off."

CHAPTER VI.

PRESENTIMENTS are strange things! and so are sympathies; and so are signs: and the three combined make one mystery to which humanity has not yet found the key. I never laughed at presentiments in my life; because I have had strange ones of my own. Sympathies I believe exist: (for instance, between far-distant, long-absent, wholly estranged relatives; asserting, notwithstanding their alienation, the unity of the source to which each traces his origin) whose workings baffle mortal comprehension. And signs, for aught we know, may be but the sympathies of Nature with man.

When I was a little girl, only six years old, I, one night, heard Bessie Leaven say to Martha Abbott that she had been dreaming about a little child; and that to dream of children was a sure sign of trouble, either to one's self or one's kin. The saying might have

worn out of my memory, had not a circumstance immediately followed which served indelibly to fix it there. The next day Bessie was sent for home to the deathbed of her little sister.

Of late I had often recalled this saying and this incident; for during the past week scarcely a night had gone over my couch that had not brought with it a dream of an infant: which I sometimes hushed in my arms, sometimes dandled on my knee, sometimes watched playing with daisies on a lawn; or again, dabbling its hands in running water. It was a wailing child this night, and a laughing one the next: now it nestled close to me, and now it ran from me; but whatever mood the apparition evinced, whatever aspect it wore, it failed not for seven successive nights to meet me the moment I entered the land of slumber.

I did not like this iteration of one idea—this strange recurrence of one image; and I grew nervous as bed-time approached, and the hour of the vision drew near. It was from companionship with this baby-phantom I had been roused on that moonlight night when I heard the cry; and it was on the afternoon of the day following I was summoned down stairs by a message that some one wanted me in Mrs.

Fairfax's room. On repairing thither, I found a man waiting for me, having the appearance of a gentleman's servant: he was dressed in deep mourning, and the hat he held in his hand was surrounded with a crape band.

"I daresay you hardly remember me, Miss," he said, rising as I entered; "but my name is Leaven: I lived coachman with Mrs. Reed when you were at Gateshead eight or nine years since, and I live there still."

"Oh, Robert! how do you do? I remember you very well: you used to give me a ride sometimes on Miss Georgiana's bay pony. And how is Bessie? You are married to Bessie?"

"Yes, Miss: my wife is very hearty, thank you; she brought me another little one about two months since—we have three now—and both mother and child are thriving."

"And are the family well at the House, Robert?"

"I am sorry I can't give you better news of them, Miss: they are very badly at present—in great trouble."

"I hope no one is dead," I said, glancing at his black dress. He too looked down at the crape round his hat and replied:—

“Mr. John died yesterday was a week, at his chambers in London.”

“Mr. John?”

“Yes.”

“And how does his mother bear it?”

“Why you see, Miss Eyre, it is not a common mishap : his life has been very wild : these last three years he gave himself up to strange ways ; and his death was shocking.”

“I heard from Bessie he was not doing well.”

“Doing well ! He could not do worse : he ruined his health and his estate amongst the worst men and the worst women. He got into debt and into jail : his mother helped him out twice, but as soon as he was free he returned to his old companions and habits. His head was not strong : the knaves he lived amongst fooled him beyond anything I ever heard. He came down to Gateshead about three weeks ago and wanted Missis to give up all to him. Missis refused : her means have long been much reduced by his extravagance ; so he went back again, and the next news was that he was dead. How he died, God knows !—they say he killed himself.”

I was silent : the tidings were frightful. Robert Leaven resumed :—

“Missis had been out of health herself for some time : she had got very stout, but was not strong with it; and the loss of money and fear of poverty were quite breaking her down. The information about Mr. John’s death and the manner of it came too suddenly : it brought on a stroke. She was three days without speaking ; but last Tuesday she seemed rather better : she appeared as if she wanted to say something, and kept making signs to my wife and mumbling. It was only yesterday morning, however, that Bessie understood she was pronouncing your name ; and at last she made out the words, ‘ Bring Jane—fetch Jane Eyre : I want to speak to her.’ Bessie is not sure whether she is in her right mind, or means anything by the words ; but she told Miss Reed and Miss Georgiana, and advised them to send for you. The young ladies put it off at first : but their mother grew so restless and said, “ Jane, Jane,” so many times, that at last they consented. I left Gateshead yesterday ; and if you can get ready, Miss, I should like to take you back with me early to-morrow morning.”

“ Yes, Robert, I shall be ready : it seems to me that I ought to go.”

“ I think so too, Miss. Bessie said she was sure you would not refuse : but I suppose

you will have to ask leave before you can get off?"

"Yes; and I will do it now;" and having directed him to the servants' hall, and recommended him to the care of John's wife, and the attentions of John himself, I went in search of Mr. Rochester.

He was not in any of the lower rooms; he was not in the yard, the stables, or the grounds. I asked Mrs. Fairfax if she had seen him;—yes; she believed he was playing billiards with Miss Ingram. To the billiard room I hastened: the click of balls and the hum of voices resounded thence; Mr. Rochester, Miss Ingram, the two Misses Eshton and their admirers, were all busied in the game. It required some courage to disturb so interesting a party; my errand, however, was one I could not defer, so I approached the master where he stood at Miss Ingram's side. She turned as I drew near, and looked at me haughtily: her eyes seemed to demand, "What can the creeping creature want now?" and when I said, in a low voice, "Mr. Rochester," she made a movement as if tempted to order me away. I remember her appearance at the moment,—it was very graceful and very striking: she wore a morning robe of sky-blue

crape; a gauzy azure scarf was twisted in her hair. She had been all animation with the game, and irritated pride did not lower the expression of her haught lineaments.

“Does that person want you?” she inquired of Mr. Rochester; and Mr. Rochester turned to see who the “person” was. He made a curious grimace,—one of his strange and equivocal demonstrations—threw down his cue and followed me from the room.

“Well, Jane?” he said, as he rested his back against the school-room door, which he had shut.

“If you please, sir, I want leave of absence for a week or two.”

“What to do?—Where to go?”

“To see a sick lady who has sent for me.”

“What sick lady?—Where does she live?”

“At Gateshead, in ——shire.”

“——shire? That is a hundred miles off! Who may she be that sends for people to see her at that distance?”

“Her name is Reed, sir,—Mrs. Reed.”

“Reed of Gateshead? There was a Reed of Gateshead, a magistrate.”

“It is his widow, sir.”

“And what have you to do with her? How do you know her?”

“Mr. Reed was my uncle,—my mother’s brother.”

“The deuce he was! You never told me that before: you always said you had no relations.”

“None that would own me, sir. Mr. Reed is dead, and his wife cast me off.”

“Why?”

“Because I was poor, and burdensome, and she disliked me.”

“But Reed left children?—you must have cousins? Sir George Lynn was talking of a Reed of Gateshead, yesterday—who he said was one of the veriest rascals on town; and Ingram was mentioning a Georgiana Reed of the same place, who was much admired for her beauty, a season or two ago, in London.

“John Reed is dead, too, sir: he ruined himself and half ruined his family, and is supposed to have committed suicide. The news so shocked his mother that it brought on an apoplectic attack.”

“And what good can you do her? Nonsense, Jane! I would never think of running a hundred miles to see an old lady who will, perhaps, be dead before you reach her: besides, you say she cast you off.”

“Yes, sir, but that is long ago; and when her circumstances were very different: I could not be easy to neglect her wishes now.”

“How long will you stay?”

“As short a time as possible, sir.”

“Promise me only to stay a week ——”

“I had better not pass my word: I might be obliged to break it.”

“At all events you *will* come back: you will not be induced under any pretext to take up a permanent residence with her?”

“Oh, no! I shall certainly return if all be well.”

“And who goes with you? You don’t travel a hundred miles alone?”

“No, sir; she has sent her coachman.”

“A person to be trusted?”

“Yes, sir, he has lived ten years in the family.”

Mr. Rochester meditated. “When do you wish to go?”

“Early to-morrow morning, sir.”

“Well, you must have some money; you can’t travel without money, and I daresay you have not much: I have given you no salary yet. How much have you in the world, Jane?” he asked, smiling.

I drew out my purse; a meagre thing it

was. "Five shillings, sir." He took the purse, poured the hoard into his palm and chuckled over it as if its scantiness pleased him. Soon he produced his pocket-book: "Here," said he, offering me a note: it was fifty pounds, and he owed me but fifteen. I told him I had no change.

"I don't want change: you know that. Take your wages."

I declined accepting more than was my due. He scowled at first; then, as if recollecting something, he said:—

"Right, right! Better not give you all now: you would, perhaps, stay away three months if you had fifty pounds. There are ten: is it not plenty?"

"Yes, sir, but now you owe me five."

"Come back for it then: I am your banker for forty pounds."

"Mr. Rochester, I may as well mention another matter of business to you while I have the opportunity."

"Matter of business? I'm curious to hear it."

"You have as good as informed me, sir, that you are going shortly to be married?"

"Yes: what then?"

"In that case, sir, Adèle ought to go to

school: I am sure you will perceive the necessity of it."

"To get her out of my bride's way; who might otherwise walk over her rather too emphatically. There's sense in the suggestion; not a doubt of it: Adèle, as you say, must go to school; and you, of course, must march straight to—the devil?"

"I hope not, sir: but I must seek another situation somewhere."

"In course!" he exclaimed, with a twang of voice and a distortion of features equally fantastic and ludicrous. He looked at me some minutes.

"And old Madam Reed, or the Misses, her daughters, will be solicited by you to seek a place, I suppose?"

"No sir; I am not on such terms with my relatives as would justify me in asking favours of them—but I shall advertise."

"You shall walk up the pyramids of Egypt!" he growled. "At your peril you advertise! I wish I had only offered you a sovereign instead of ten pounds. Give me back nine pounds, Jane; I've a use for it."

"And so have I, sir," I returned, putting my hands and my purse behind me. "I could not spare the money on any account."

“Little niggard!” said he, “refusing me a pecuniary request! Give me five pounds, Jane.”

“Not five shillings, sir; nor five pence.”

“Just let me look at the cash.”

“No, sir; you are not to be trusted.”

“Jane!”

“Sir?”

“Promise me one thing.”

“I’ll promise you anything, sir, that I think I am likely to perform.”

“Not to advertise: and to trust this quest of a situation to me. I’ll find you one in time.”

“I shall be glad so to do, sir; if you, in your turn, will promise that I and Adèle shall be both safe out of the house before your bride enters it.”

“Very well! very well! I’ll pledge my word on it. You go to-morrow, then?”

“Yes, sir; early.”

“Shall you come down to the drawing-room after dinner?”

“No, sir, I must prepare for the journey.”

“Then you and I must bid good-bye for a little while?”

“I suppose so, sir.”

“And how do people perform that cere-

mony of parting, Jane? Teach me: I'm not quite up to it."

"They say farewell; or any other form they prefer."

"Then say it."

"Farewell, Mr. Rochester, for the present."

"What must I say?"

"The same, if you like, sir."

"Farewell, Miss Eyre, for the present: is that all?"

"Yes."

"It seems stingy, to my notions, and dry, and unfriendly. I should like something else: a little addition to the rite. If one shook hands, for instance; but no,—that would not content me either. So you'll do no more than say 'farewell,' Jane?"

"It is enough, sir: as much good-will may be conveyed in one hearty word as in many."

"Very likely; but it is blank and cool—'farewell.'"

"How long is he going to stand with his back against that door?" I asked myself; "I want to commence my packing." The dinner-bell rang, and suddenly away he bolted, without another syllable: I saw him no more during the day, and was off before he had risen in the morning.

I reached the lodge at Gateshead about five o'clock in the afternoon of the first of May: I stepped in there before going up to the hall. It was very clean and neat; the ornamental windows were hung with little white curtains; the floor was spotless; the grate and fire-irons were burnished bright, and the fire burnt clear. Bessie sat on the hearth, nursing her last-born, and Robert and his sister played quietly in a corner.

"Bless you!—I knew you would come!" exclaimed Mrs. Leaven, as I entered.

"Yes, Bessie," said I, after I had kissed her; "and I trust I am not too late. How is Mrs. Reed?—Alive still, I hope."

"Yes, she is alive; and more sensible and collected than she was. The doctor says she may linger a week or two yet: but he hardly thinks she will finally recover."

"Has she mentioned me lately?"

"She was talking of you only this morning, and wishing you would come: but she is sleeping now; or was ten minutes ago, when I was up at the house. She generally lies in a kind of lethargy all the afternoon, and wakes up about six or seven. Will you rest yourself here an hour, Miss; and then I will go up with you?"

Robert here entered, and Bessie laid her sleeping child in the cradle and went to welcome him: afterwards she insisted on my taking off my bonnet and having some tea; for she said I looked pale and tired. I was glad to accept her hospitality; and I submitted to be relieved of my travelling garb just as passively as I used to let her undress me when a child.

Old times crowded fast back on me as I watched her bustling about—setting out the tea-tray with her best china, cutting bread and butter, toasting a tea-cake, and, between whiles, giving little Robert or Jane an occasional tap or push, just as she used to give me in former days. Bessie had retained her quick temper as well as her light foot and good looks.

Tea ready, I was going to approach the table; but she desired me to sit still, quite in her old, peremptory tones. I must be served at the fire-side, she said; and she placed before me a little round stand with my cup and a plate of toast, absolutely as she used to accommodate me with some privately purloined dainty on a nursery chair: and I smiled and obeyed her as in bygone days.

She wanted to know if I was happy at

Thornfield Hall, and what sort of a person the mistress was; and when I told her there was only a master, whether he was a nice gentleman, and if I liked him. I told her he was rather an ugly man, but quite a gentleman; and that he treated me kindly, and I was content. Then I went on to describe to her the gay company that had lately been staying at the house; and to these details Bessie listened with interest: they were precisely of the kind she relished.

In such conversation an hour was soon gone: Bessie restored to me my bonnet, &c. and, accompanied by her, I quitted the lodge for the hall. It was also accompanied by her that I had, nearly nine years ago, walked down the path I was now ascending. On a dark, misty, raw morning in January, I had left a hostile roof with a desperate and embittered heart—a sense of outlawry and almost of reprobation—to seek the chilly harbourage of Lowood: that bourne so far away and unexplored. The same hostile roof now again rose before me: my prospects were doubtful yet; and I had yet an aching heart. I still felt as a wanderer on the face of the earth: but I experienced firmer trust in myself and my own powers, and less withering dread of oppression. The

gaping wound of my wrongs, too, was now quite healed; and the flame of resentment extinguished.

“You shall go into the breakfast-room first,” said Bessie, as she preceded me through the hall; “the young ladies will be there.”

In another moment I was within that apartment. There was every article of furniture looking just as it did on the morning I was first introduced to Mr. Brocklehurst: the very rug he had stood upon still covered the hearth. Glancing at the book-cases, I thought I could distinguish the two volumes of Bewick’s British Birds occupying their old place on the third shelf, and Gulliver’s Travels and the Arabian Nights ranged just above. The inanimate objects were not changed: but the living things had altered past recognition.

Two young ladies appeared before me; one very tall, almost as tall as Miss Ingram,—very thin too, with a sallow face and severe mien. There was something ascetic in her look, which was augmented by the extreme plainness of a strait-skirted, black, stuff dress, a starched linen collar, hair combed away from the temples, and the nun-like ornament of a string of ebony beads and a crucifix. This I felt sure was Eliza, though I could

trace little resemblance to her former self in that elongated and colourless visage.

The other was as certainly Georgiana; but not the Georgiana I remembered—the slim and fairy-like girl of eleven. This was a full-blown, very plump damsel, fair as wax-work; with handsome and regular features, languishing blue eyes, and ringleted yellow hair. The hue of her dress was black too; but its fashion was so different from her sister's—so much more flowing and becoming—it looked as stylish as the other's looked puritanical.

In each of the sisters there was one trait of the mother—and only one: the thin and pallid elder daughter had her parent's Cairngorm eye; the blooming and luxuriant younger girl had her contour of jaw and chin,—perhaps a little softened, but still imparting an indescribable hardness to the countenance, otherwise so voluptuous and buxom.

Both ladies, as I advanced, rose to welcome me, and both addressed me by the name of “Miss Eyre.” Eliza's greeting was delivered in a short, abrupt voice, without a smile; and then she sat down again, fixed her eyes on the fire, and seemed to forget me. Georgiana added to her “How d'ye do?” several common-places about my journey, the weather, and

so on, uttered in rather a drawling tone; and accompanied by sundry side-glances that measured me from head to foot—now traversing the folds of my drab merino pelisse, and now lingering on the plain trimming of my cottage bonnet. Young ladies have a remarkable way of letting you know that they think you a “quiz,” without actually saying the words. A certain superciliousness of look, coolness of manner, nonchalance of tone, express fully their sentiments on the point, without committing them by any positive rudeness in word or deed.

A sneer, however, whether covert or open, had now no longer that power over me it once possessed: as I sat between my cousins, I was surprised to find how easy I felt under the total neglect of the one and the semi-sarcastic attentions of the other—Eliza did not mortify, nor Georgiana ruffle me. The fact was, I had other things to think about: within the last few months feelings had been stirred in me so much more potent than any they could raise—pains and pleasures so much more acute and exquisite had been excited, than any it was in their power to inflict or bestow—that their airs gave me no concern either for good or bad.

“How is Mrs. Reed?” I asked soon, looking calmly at Georgiana; who thought fit to bridle at the direct address, as if it were an unexpected liberty.

“Mrs. Reed? Ah! mama you mean; she is extremely poorly: I doubt if you can see her to-night.”

“If,” said I, “you would just step up stairs and tell her I am come, I should be much obliged to you.”

Georgiana almost started, and she opened her blue eyes wild and wide. “I know she had a particular wish to see me,” I added, “and I would not defer attending to her desire longer than is absolutely necessary.”

“Mama dislikes being disturbed in an evening,” remarked Eliza. I soon rose, quietly took off my bonnet and gloves, uninvited, and said I would just step out to Bessie—who was, I dared say, in the kitchen—and ask her to ascertain whether Mrs. Reed was disposed to receive me or not to-night. I went, and having found Bessie and despatched her on my errand, I proceeded to take further measures. It had heretofore been my habit always to shrink from arrogance: received as I had been to-day, I should, a year ago, have resolved to quit Gateshead the very next morn-

ing; now, it was disclosed to me all at once, that that would be a foolish plan. I had taken a journey of a hundred miles to see my aunt, and I must stay with her till she was better—or dead: as to her daughters' pride or folly, I must put it on one side: make myself independent of it. So I addressed the housekeeper; asked her to show me a room, told her I should probably be a visitor here for a week or two, had my trunk conveyed to my chamber, and followed it thither myself: I met Bessie on the landing.

“Missis is awake,” said she; “I have told her you are here: come and let us see if she will know you.”

I did not need to be guided to the well-known room: to which I had so often been summoned for chastisement or reprimand in former days. I hastened before Bessie, I softly opened the door: a shaded light stood on the table, for it was now getting dark. There was the great four-post bed with amber hangings as of old; there the toilet-table, the arm-chair and the footstool: at which I had a hundred times been sentenced to kneel, to ask pardon for offences, by me, uncommitted. I looked into a certain corner near, half-expecting to see the slim outline of a once dreaded

switch; which used to lurk there, waiting to leap out imp-like and lace my quivering palm or shrinking neck. I approached the bed; I opened the curtains and leant over the high-piled pillows.

Well did I remember Mrs. Reed's face, and I eagerly sought the familiar image. It is a happy thing that time quells the longings of vengeance, and hushes the promptings of rage and aversion: I had left this woman in bitterness and hate, and I came back to her now with no other emotion than a sort of ruth for her great sufferings, and a strong yearning to forget and forgive all injuries—to be reconciled, and clasp hands in amity.

The well-known face was there: stern, relentless as ever—there was that peculiar eye which nothing could melt; and the somewhat raised, imperious, despotic eyebrow. How often had it lowered on me menace and hate! and how the recollection of childhood's terrors and sorrows revived as I traced its harsh line now! And yet I stooped down and kissed her: she looked at me.

“Is this Jane Eyre?” she said.

“Yes, Aunt Reed. How are you, dear aunt?”

I had once vowed that I would never call

her aunt again : I thought it no sin to forget and break that vow, now. My fingers had fastened on her hand which lay outside the sheet : had she pressed mine kindly, I should at that moment have experienced true pleasure. But unimpressionable natures are not so soon softened, nor are natural antipathies so readily eradicated : Mrs. Reed took her hand away, and turning her face rather from me, she remarked that the night was warm. Again she regarded me, so icily, I felt at once that her opinion of me—her feeling towards me—was unchanged, and unchangeable. I knew by her stony eye—opaque to tenderness, indissoluble to tears—that she was resolved to consider me bad to the last ; because to believe me good, would give her no generous pleasure : only a sense of mortification.

I felt pain, and then I felt ire ; and then I felt a determination to subdue her—to be her mistress in spite both of her nature and her will. My tears had risen, just as in childhood : I ordered them back to their source. I brought a chair to the bed-head : I sat down and leaned over the pillow.

“ You sent for me,” I said, “ and I am here ; and it is my intention to stay till I see how you get on.”

“ Oh, of course! You have seen my daughters?”

“ Yes.”

“ Well, you may tell them I wish you to stay, till I can talk some things over with you I have on my mind : to-night it is too late ; and I have a difficulty in recalling them. But there was something I wished to say—let me see——”

The wandering look and changed utterance told what wreck had taken place in her once vigorous frame. Turning restlessly, she drew the bed-clothes round her ; my elbow, resting on a corner of the quilt, fixed it down : she was at once irritated.

“ Sit up!” said she, “ don’t annoy me with holding the clothes fast—are you Jane Eyre?”

“ I am Jane Eyre.”

“ I have had more trouble with that child than any one would believe. Such a burden to be left on my hands—and so much annoyance as she caused me, daily and hourly, with her incomprehensible disposition, and her sudden starts of temper, and her continual, unnatural watchings of one’s movements! I declare she talked to me once like something mad, or like a fiend—no child ever spoke or looked as she did: I was glad to get her away from the house. What did they do with her at Lo-

wood? The fever broke out there, and many of the pupils died. She, however, did not die: but I said she did—I wish she had died!”

“A strange wish, Mrs. Reed: why do you hate her so?”

“I had a dislike to her mother always; for she was my husband’s only sister, and a great favourite with him: he opposed the family’s disowning her when she made her low marriage; and when news came of her death, he wept like a simpleton. He would send for the baby; though I entreated him rather to put it out to nurse and pay for its maintenance. I hated it the first time I set my eyes on it—a sickly, whining, pining thing! It would wail in its cradle all night long—not screaming heartily like any other child, but whimpering and moaning. Reed pitied it; and he used to nurse it and notice it as if it had been his own: more, indeed, than he ever noticed his own at that age. He would try to make my children friendly to the little beggar: the darlings could not bear it, and he was angry with them when they showed their dislike. In his last illness, he had it brought continually to his bedside; and but an hour before he died, he bound me by a vow to keep the creature. I would as soon have been

charged with a pauper brat out of a work-house: but he was weak, naturally weak. John does not at all resemble his father, and I am glad of it: John is like me and like my brothers—he is quite a Gibson. Oh, I wish he would cease tormenting me with letters for money! I have no more money to give him: we are getting poor. I must send away half the servants and shut up part of the house; or let it off. I can never submit to do that—yet how are we to get on? Two-thirds of my income goes in paying the interest of mortgages. John gambles dreadfully, and always loses—poor boy! He is beset by sharpers: John is sunk and degraded—his look is frightful—I feel ashamed for him when I see him.”

She was getting much excited. “I think I had better leave her now,” said I to Bessie, who stood on the other side of the bed.

“Perhaps you had, Miss: but she often talks in this way towards night—in the morning she is calmer.”

I rose. “Stop!” exclaimed Mrs. Reed. “There is another thing I wished to say. He threatens me—he continually threatens me with his own death, or mine: and I dream sometimes that I see him laid out with a great

wound in his throat, or with a swollen and blackened face. I am come to a strange pass: I have heavy troubles. What is to be done? How is the money to be had?"

Bessie now endeavoured to persuade her to take a sedative draught: she succeeded with difficulty. Soon after, Mrs. Reed grew more composed, and sank into a dozing state. I then left her.

More than ten days elapsed before I had again any conversation with her. She continued either delirious or lethargic; and the doctor forbade everything which could painfully excite her. Meantime, I got on as well as I could with Georgiana and Eliza. They were very cold, indeed, at first. Eliza would sit half the day sewing, reading, or writing, and scarcely utter a word either to me or her sister. Georgiana would chatter nonsense to her canary bird by the hour, and take no notice of me. But I was determined not to seem at a loss for occupation or amusement: I had brought my drawing materials with me, and they served me for both.

Provided with a case of pencils, and some sheets of paper, I used to take a seat apart from them, near the window, and busy myself in sketching fancy vignettes, representing any

scene that happened momentarily to shape itself in the ever-shifting kaleidoscope of imagination: a glimpse of sea between two rocks; the rising moon, and a ship crossing its disk; a group of reeds and water-flags, and a naiad's head, crowned with lotus-flowers, rising out of them; an elf sitting in a hedge-sparrow's nest, under a wreath of hawthorn-bloom.

One morning I fell to sketching a face: what sort of a face it was to be I did not care or know. I took a soft black pencil, gave it a broad point, and worked away. Soon I had traced on the paper a broad and prominent forehead, and a square lower outline of visage: that contour gave me pleasure; my fingers proceeded actively to fill it with features. Strongly marked horizontal eyebrows must be traced under that brow; then followed, naturally, a well-defined nose, with a straight ridge and full nostrils; then a flexible-looking mouth, by no means narrow; then a firm chin, with a decided cleft down the middle of it: of course, some black whiskers were wanted, and some jetty hair, tufted on the temples, and waved above the forehead. Now for the eyes: I had left them to the last, because they required the most careful working. I drew

them large; I shaped them well: the eye-lashes I traced long and sombre; the irids lustrous and large. "Good! but not quite the thing," I thought, as I surveyed the effect: "They want more force and spirit;" and I wrought the shades blacker, that the lights might flash more brilliantly—a happy touch or two secured success. There, I had a friend's face under my gaze: and what did it signify that those young ladies turned their backs on me? I looked at it; I smiled at the speaking likeness: I was absorbed and content.

"Is that a portrait of some one you know?" asked Eliza, who had approached me unnoticed. I responded that it was merely a fancy head, and hurried it beneath the other sheets. Of course, I lied: it was, in fact, a very faithful representation of Mr. Rochester. But what was that to her; or to any one but myself? Georgiana also advanced to look. The other drawings pleased her much, but she called that "an ugly man." They both seemed surprised at my skill. I offered to sketch their portraits; and each, in turn, sat for a pencil outline. Then Georgiana produced her album. I promised to contribute a water-colour drawing: this put her at once into good humour. She proposed a walk in

the grounds. Before we had been out two hours, we were deep in a confidential conversation: she had favoured me with a description of the brilliant winter she had spent in London two seasons ago—of the admiration she had there excited—the attention she had received; and I even got hints of the titled conquest she had made. In the course of the afternoon and evening these hints were enlarged on: various soft conversations were reported, and sentimental scenes represented; and, in short, a volume of a novel of fashionable life was that day improvised by her for my benefit. The communications were renewed from day to day: they always ran on the same theme—herself, her loves, and woes. It was strange she never once adverted either to her mother's illness, or her brother's death, or the present gloomy state of the family prospects. Her mind seemed wholly taken up with reminiscences of past gaiety, and aspirations after dissipations to come. She passed about five minutes each day in her mother's sick-room, and no more.

Eliza still spoke little: she had evidently no time to talk. I never saw a busier person than she seemed to be; yet it was difficult to say what she did: or rather, to discover any

result of her diligence. She had an alarm to call her up early. I know not how she occupied herself before breakfast, but after that meal she divided her time into regular portions; and each hour had its allotted task. Three times a day she studied a little book, which I found, on inspection, was a Common Prayer Book. I asked her once what was the great attraction of that volume, and she said "the Rubric." Three hours she gave to stitching, with gold thread, the border of a square crimson cloth, almost large enough for a carpet. In answer to my inquiries after the use of this article, she informed me it was a covering for the altar of a new church lately erected near Gateshead. Two hours she devoted to her diary; two to working by herself in the kitchen-garden; and one to the regulation of her accounts. She seemed to want no company; no conversation. I believe she was happy in her way: this routine sufficed to her; and nothing annoyed her so much as the occurrence of any incident which forced her to vary its clock-work regularity.

She told me one evening, when more disposed to be communicative than usual, that John's conduct, and the threatened ruin of the family, had been a source of profound affliction

to her: but she had now, she said, settled her mind, and formed her resolution. Her own fortune she had taken care to secure; and when her mother died,—and it was wholly improbable, she tranquilly remarked, that she should either recover or linger long—she would execute a long-cherished project: seek a retirement where punctual habits would be permanently secured from disturbance, and place safe barriers between herself and a frivolous world. I asked if Georgiana would accompany her.

“Of course not. Georgiana and she had nothing in common: they never had had. She would not be burdened with her society for any consideration. Georgiana should take her own course; and she, Eliza, would take hers.”

Georgiana, when not unburdening her heart to me, spent most of her time in lying on the sofa, fretting about the dulness of the house, and wishing over and over again that her Aunt Gibson would send her an invitation up to town. “It would be so much better,” she said, “if she could only get out of the way for a month or two, till all was over.” I did not ask what she meant by “all being over,” but I suppose she referred to the expected decease of her mother, and the gloomy sequel of

funeral rites. Eliza generally took no more notice of her sister's indolence and complaints than if no such murmuring, lounging object had been before her. One day, however, as she put away her account-book, and unfolded her embroidery, she suddenly took her up thus:—

“Georgiana, a more vain and absurd animal than you, was certainly never allowed to cumber the earth. You had no right to be born; for you make no use of life. Instead of living for, in, and with yourself, as a reasonable being ought, you seek only to fasten your feebleness on some other person's strength: if no one can be found willing to burden her or himself with such a fat, weak, puffy, useless thing, you cry out that you are ill-treated, neglected, miserable. Then, too, existence for you must be a scene of continual change and excitement, or else the world is a dungeon: you must be admired, you must be courted, you must be flattered—you must have music, dancing, and society—or you languish, you die away. Have you no sense to devise a system which will make you independent of all efforts, and all wills, but your own? Take one day; share it into sections; to each section apportion its task: leave no stray unemployed quarters of an hour, ten

minutes, five minutes,—include all; do each piece of business in its turn with method, with rigid regularity. The day will close almost before you are aware it has begun; and you are indebted to no one for helping you to get rid of one vacant moment: you have had to seek no one's company, conversation, sympathy, forbearance: you have lived, in short, as an independent being ought to do. Take this advice: the first and last I shall offer you; then you will not want me or any one else, happen what may. Neglect it—go on as heretofore, craving, whining, and idling—and suffer the results of your idiocy: however bad and insufferable they may be. I tell you this plainly; and listen: for though I shall no more repeat what I am now about to say, I shall steadily act on it. After my mother's death, I wash my hands of you: from the day her coffin is carried to the vault in Gateshead church, you and I will be as separate as if we had never known each other. You need not think that because we chanced to be born of the same parents, I shall suffer you to fasten me down by even the feeblest claim: I tell you this—if the whole human race, ourselves excepted, were swept away, and we two stood alone on the earth, I would

leave you in the old world, and betake myself to the new."

She closed her lips.

"You might have spared yourself the trouble of delivering that tirade," answered Georgiana. "Everybody knows you are the most selfish, heartless creature in existence; and *I* know your spiteful hatred towards me: I have had a specimen of it before in the trick you played me about Lord Edwin Vere: you could not bear me to be raised above you, to have a title, to be received into circles where you dare not show your face, and so you acted the spy and informer, and ruined my prospects for ever." Georgiana took out her handkerchief and blew her nose for an hour afterwards; Eliza sat cold, impassable, and assiduously industrious.

True, generous feeling is made small account of by some: but here were two natures rendered, the one intolerably acrid, the other despicably savourless for the want of it. Feeling without judgment is a washy draught indeed; but judgment untempered by feeling is too bitter and husky a morsel for human deglutition.

It was a wet and windy afternoon: Georgiana had fallen asleep on the sofa over the

perusal of a novel; Eliza was gone to attend a saint's-day service at the New Church—for in matters of religion she was a rigid formalist: no weather ever prevented the punctual discharge of what she considered her devotional duties; fair or foul she went to church thrice every Sunday, and as often on week-days as there were prayers.

I bethought myself to go up stairs and see how the dying woman sped, who lay there almost unheeded: the very servants paid her but a remittent attention; the hired nurse, being little looked after, would slip out of the room whenever she could. Bessie was faithful; but she had her own family to mind, and could only come occasionally to the Hall. I found the sick-room unwatched, as I had expected: no nurse was there; the patient lay still, and seemingly lethargic; her livid face sunk in the pillows: the fire was dying in the grate. I renewed the fuel, re-arranged the bedclothes, gazed awhile on her who could not now gaze on me, and then I moved away to the window.

The rain beat strongly against the panes, the wind blew tempestuously: "One lies there," I thought, "who will soon be beyond the war of earthly elements. Whither will

that spirit—now struggling to quit its material tenement—flit when at length released?”

In pondering the great mystery, I thought of Helen Burns: recalled her dying words—her faith—her doctrine of the equality of disembodied souls. I was still listening in thought to her well-remembered tones—still picturing her pale and spiritual aspect, her wasted face and sublime gaze, as she lay on her placid deathbed, and whispered her longing to be restored to her divine Father’s bosom—when a feeble voice murmured from the couch behind: “Who is that?”

I knew Mrs. Reed had not spoken for days: was she reviving? I went up to her.

“It is I, Aunt Reed.”

“Who—I?” was her answer. “Who are you?” looking at me with surprise and a sort of alarm, but still not wildly. “You are quite a stranger to me—where is Bessie?”

“She is at the lodge, Aunt.”

“Aunt!” she repeated. “Who calls me Aunt? You are not one of the Gibsons; and yet I know you—that face, and the eyes and forehead are quite familiar to me: you are like—why, you are like Jane Eyre!”

I said nothing: I was afraid of occasioning some shock by declaring my identity.

“Yet,” said she, “I am afraid it is a mistake: my thoughts deceive me. I wished to see Jane Eyre, and I fancy a likeness where none exists: besides in eight years she must be so changed.” I now gently assured her that I was the person she supposed and desired me to be; and seeing that I was understood, and that her senses were quite collected, I explained how Bessie had sent her husband to fetch me from Thornfield.

“I am very ill, I know,” she said ere long; “I was trying to turn myself a few minutes since, and find I cannot move a limb. It is as well I should ease my mind before I die: what we think little of in health, burdens us at such an hour as the present is to me. Is the nurse here? or is there no one in the room but you?”

I assured her we were alone.

“Well, I have twice done you a wrong which I regret now. One was in breaking the promise which I gave my husband to bring you up as my own child; the other——” she stopped. “After all, it is of no great importance perhaps,” she murmured to herself: “and then I may get better; and to humble myself so to her is painful.”

She made an effort to alter her position, but failed: her face changed; she seemed to expe-

rience some inward sensation—the precursor, perhaps, of the last pang.

“Well: I must get it over. Eternity is before me: I had better tell her. Go to my dressing-case, open it, and take out a letter you will see there.”

I obeyed her directions. “Read the letter,” she said.

It was short, and thus conceived:—

“MADAM,

“Will you have the goodness to send me the address of my niece, Jane Eyre, and to tell me how she is: it is my intention to write shortly and desire her to come to me at Madeira. Providence has blessed my endeavours to secure a competency; and as I am unmarried and childless, I wish to adopt her during my life, and bequeath her at my death whatever I may have to leave.”

“I am, Madam, &c. &c.

“JOHN EYRE, Madeira.”

It was dated three years back.

“Why did I never hear of this?” I asked.

“Because I disliked you too fixedly and thoroughly ever to lend a hand in lifting you to prosperity. I could not forget your con-

duct to me, Jane—the fury with which you once turned on me; the tone in which you declared you abhorred me the worst of anybody in the world; the unchildlike look and voice with which you affirmed that the very thought of me made you sick, and asserted that I had treated you with miserable cruelty. I could not forget my own sensations when you thus started up and poured out the venom of your mind: I felt fear, as if an animal that I had struck or pushed had looked up at me with human eyes and cursed me in a man's voice.—Bring me some water! Oh, make haste!”

“Dear Mrs. Reed,” said I, as I offered her the draught she required, “think no more of all this, let it pass away from your mind. Forgive me for my passionate language: I was a child then; eight, nine years have passed since that day.”

She heeded nothing of what I said; but when she had tasted the water and drawn breath, she went on thus:—

“I tell you I could not forget it; and I took my revenge: for you to be adopted by your uncle and placed in a state of ease and comfort was what I could not endure. I wrote to him; I said I was sorry for his disappointment, but

Jane Eyre was dead : she had died of typhus fever at Lowood. Now act as you please : write and contradict my assertion—expose my falsehood as soon as you like. You were born, I think, to be my torment : my last hour is racked by the recollection of a deed which, but for you, I should never have been tempted to commit.”

“If you could but be persuaded to think no more of it, aunt, and to regard me with kindness and forgiveness——”

“You have a very bad disposition,” said she, “and one, to this day I feel it impossible to understand : how for nine years you could be patient and quiescent under any treatment, and in the tenth break out all fire and violence, I can never comprehend.”

“My disposition is not so bad as you think : I am passionate, but not vindictive. Many a time, as a little child, I should have been glad to love you if you would have let me ; and I long earnestly to be reconciled to you now : kiss me, aunt.”

I approached my cheek to her lips : she would not touch it. She said I oppressed her by leaning over the bed ; and again demanded water. As I laid her down—for I raised her and supported her on my arm while she drank—

I covered her ice-cold and clammy hand with mine: the feeble fingers shrank from my touch—the glazing eyes shunned my gaze.

“ Love me, then, or hate me, as you will,” I said at last, “ you have my full and free forgiveness: ask now for God’s; and be at peace.”

Poor, suffering woman! it was too late for her to make now the effort to change her habitual frame of mind: living, she had ever hated me—dying, she must hate me still.

The nurse now entered, and Bessie followed. I yet lingered half an hour longer, hoping to see some sign of amity: but she gave none. She was fast relapsing into stupor; nor did her mind again rally: at twelve o’clock that night she died. I was not present to close her eyes; nor were either of her daughters. They came to tell us the next morning that all was over. She was by that time laid out. Eliza and I went to look at her: Georgiana, who had burst out into loud weeping, said she dared not go. There was stretched Sarah Reed’s once robust and active frame, rigid and still: her eye of flint was covered with its cold lid; her brow and strong traits wore yet the impress of her inexorable soul. A strange and solemn object was that corpse to me. I

gazed on it with gloom and pain: nothing soft, nothing sweet, nothing pitying, or hopeful, or subduing, did it inspire; only a grating anguish for *her* woes—not *my* loss—and a sombre tearless dismay at the fearfulness of death in such a form.

Eliza surveyed her parent calmly. After a silence of some minutes she observed:—

“With her constitution she should have lived to a good old age: her life was shortened by trouble.” And then a spasm constricted her mouth for an instant: as it passed away she turned and left the room, and so did I. Neither of us had dropt a tear.

CHAPTER VII.

MR. ROCHESTER had given me but one week's leave of absence: yet a month elapsed before I quitted Gateshead. I wished to leave immediately after the funeral; but Georgiana entreated me to stay till she could get off to London: whither she was now at last invited by her uncle, Mr. Gibson; who had come down to direct his sister's interment, and settle the family affairs. Georgiana said she dreaded being left alone with Eliza: from her she got neither sympathy in her dejection, support in her fears, nor aid in her preparations; so I bore with her feeble-minded quailings, and selfish lamentations, as well as I could, and did my best in sewing for her and packing her dresses. It is true, that while I worked, she would idle; and I thought to myself, "If you and I were destined to live always together, cousin, we would commence matters on a different

footing. I should not settle tamely down into being the forbearing party; I should assign you your share of labour, and compel you to accomplish it, or else it should be left undone: I should insist, also, on your keeping some of those drawling, half insincere complaints hushed in your own breast. It is only because our connection happens to be very transitory, and comes at a peculiarly mournful season, that I consent thus to render it so patient and compliant on my part."

At last I saw Georgiana off: but now it was Eliza's turn to request me to stay another week. Her plans required all her time and attention, she said: she was about to depart for some unknown bourne; and all day long she stayed in her own room, her door bolted within, filling trunks, emptying drawers, burning papers, and holding no communication with any one. She wished me to look after the house, to see callers, and answer notes of condolence.

One morning she told me I was at liberty. "And," she added, "I am obliged to you for your valuable services and discreet conduct. There is some difference between living with such a one as you, and with Georgiana: you perform your own part in life, and burden no

one. To-morrow," she continued, " I set out for the continent. I shall take up my abode in a religious house, near Lisle—a nunnery you would call it: there I shall be quiet and unmolested. I shall devote myself for a time to the examination of the Roman Catholic dogmas, and to a careful study of the workings of their system: if I find it to be, as I half suspect it is, the one best calculated to ensure the doing of all things decently and in order, I shall embrace the tenets of Rome and probably take the veil."

I neither expressed surprise at this resolution nor attempted to dissuade her from it. "The vocation will fit you to a hair," I thought: "much good may it do you!"

When we parted, she said: "Good-bye, cousin Jane Eyre; I wish you well: you have some sense."

I then returned: "You are not without sense, cousin Eliza; but what you have, I suppose in another year will be walled up alive in a French convent. However, it is not my business, and so it suits you—I don't much care."

"You are in the right," said she: and with these words we each went our separate way. As I shall not have occasion to refer either to her or her sister again I may as well mention

here, that Georgiana made an advantageous match with a wealthy worn-out man of fashion ; and that Eliza actually took the veil, and is at this day superior of the convent where she passed the period of her novitiate : and which she endowed with her fortune.

How people feel when they are returning home after an absence, long or short, I did not know : I had never experienced the sensation. I had known what it was to come back to Gateshead, when a child, after a long walk—to be scolded for looking cold or gloomy ; and later, what it was to come back from church to Lowood—to long for a plenteous meal and a good fire, and to be unable to get either. Neither of these returnings were very pleasant or desirable: no magnet drew me to a given point, increasing in its strength of attraction the nearer I came. The return to Thornfield was yet to be tried.

My journey seemed tedious—very tedious : fifty miles one day, a night spent at an inn ; fifty miles the next day. During the first twelve hours I thought of Mrs. Reed in her last moments : I saw her disfigured and discoloured face, and heard her strangely altered voice. I mused on the funeral day, the coffin, the hearse, the black train of tenants and ser-

vants—few was the number of relatives—the gaping vault, the silent church, the solemn service. Then I thought of Eliza and Georgiana: I beheld one the cynosure of a ball-room, the other the inmate of a convent cell; and I dwelt on and analyzed their separate peculiarities of person and character. The evening arrival at the great town of —— scattered these thoughts; night gave them quite another turn: laid down on my traveller's bed, I left reminiscence for anticipation.

I was going back to Thornfield: but how long was I to stay there? Not long: of that I was sure. I had heard from Mrs. Fairfax in the interim of my absence: the party at the hall was dispersed; Mr. Rochester had left for London three weeks ago, but he was then expected to return in a fortnight. Mrs. Fairfax surmised that he was gone to make arrangements for his wedding, as he had talked of purchasing a new carriage: she said the idea of his marrying Miss Ingram still seemed strange to her; but from what everybody said, and from what she had herself seen, she could no longer doubt that the event would shortly take place. “You would be strangely incredulous if you did doubt it,” was my mental comment. “I don't doubt it.”

The question followed, "Where was I to go?" I dreamt of Miss Ingram all the night: in a vivid morning dream I saw her closing the gates of Thornfield against me and pointing me out another road; and Mr. Rochester looked on with his arms folded—smiling sardonically, as it seemed, at both her and me.

I had not notified to Mrs. Fairfax the exact day of my return; for I did not wish either car or carriage to meet me at Millcote. I proposed to walk the distance quietly by myself; and very quietly, after leaving my box in the ostler's care, did I slip away from the George Inn, about six o'clock of a June evening, and take the old road to Thornfield: a road which lay chiefly through fields, and was now little frequented.

It was not a bright or splendid summer evening, though fair and soft: the hay-makers were at work all along the road; and the sky, though far from cloudless, was such as promised well for the future: its blue—where blue was visible—was mild and settled, and its cloud strata high and thin. The west, too, was warm: no watery gleam chilled it—it seemed as if there was a fire lit, an altar burning behind its screen of marbled vapour, and out of apertures shone a golden redness.

I felt glad as the road shortened before me: so glad that I stopped once to ask myself what that joy meant; and to remind reason that it was not to my home I was going, or to a permanent resting-place, or to a place where fond friends looked out for me and waited my arrival. "Mrs. Fairfax will smile you a calm welcome, to be sure," said I; "and little Adèle will clap her hands and jump to see you: but you know very well you are thinking of another than they; and that he is not thinking of you."

But what is so headstrong as youth? What so blind as inexperience? These affirmed that it was pleasure enough to have the privilege of again looking on Mr. Rochester, whether he looked on me or not; and they added—"Hasten! hasten! be with him while you may: but a few more days or weeks, at most, and you are parted from him for ever!" And then I strangled a new-born agony—a deformed thing which I could not persuade myself to own and rear—and ran on.

They are making hay, too, in Thornfield meadows: or rather, the labourers are just quitting their work, and returning home with their rakes on their shoulders; now, at the hour I arrive. I have but a field or two to

traverse, and then I shall cross the road and reach the gates. How full the hedges are of roses! But I have no time to gather any; I want to be at the house. I pass a tall briar, shooting leafy and flowery branches across the path; I see the narrow stile with stone steps; and I see—Mr. Rochester sitting there, a book and a pencil in his hand: he is writing.

Well, he is not a ghost; yet every nerve I have is unstrung: for a moment I am beyond my own mastery. What does it mean? I did not think I should tremble in this way when I saw him—or lose my voice or the power of motion in his presence. I will go back as soon as I can stir: I need not make an absolute fool of myself. I know another way to the house. It does not signify if I knew twenty ways; for he has seen me.

“Hillo!” he cries; and he puts up his book and his pencil. “There you are! Come on, if you please.”

I suppose I do come on; though in what fashion I know not: being scarcely cognizant of my movements, and solicitous only to appear calm; and, above all, to control the working muscles of my face—which I feel rebel insolently against my will, and struggle to express what I had resolved to conceal. But I have a

veil—it is down: I may make shift yet to behave with decent composure.

“And this is Jane Eyre? Are you coming from Millcote, and on foot? Yes—just one of your tricks: not to send for a carriage, and come clattering over street and road like a common mortal, but to steal into the vicinage of your home along with twilight, just as if you were a dream or a shade. What the deuce have you done with yourself this last month?”

“I have been with my aunt, sir, who is dead.”

“A true Janian reply! Good angels be my guard! She comes from the other world—from the abode of people who are dead; and tells me so when she meets me alone here in the gloaming! If I dared, I’d touch you, to see if you are substance or shadow, you elf!—but I’d as soon offer to take hold of a blue *ignis fatuus* light in a marsh. Truant! truant!” he added, when he had paused an instant. “Absent from me a whole month: and forgetting me quite, I’ll be sworn!”

I knew there would be pleasure in meeting my master again; even though broken by the fear that he was so soon to cease to be my master, and by the knowledge that I was

nothing to him: but there was ever in Mr. Rochester (so at least I thought) such a wealth of the power of communicating happiness, that to taste but of the crumbs he scattered to stray and stranger birds like me, was to feast genially. His last words were balm: they seemed to imply that it imported something to him whether I forgot him or not. And he had spoken of Thornfield as my home—would that it were my home!

He did not leave the stile, and I hardly liked to ask to go by. I inquired soon if he had not been to London.

“Yes: I suppose you found that out by second-sight.”

“Mrs. Fairfax told me in a letter.”

“And did she inform you what I went to do?”

“Oh, yes, sir! Everybody knew your errand.”

“You must see the carriage, Jane, and tell me if you don’t think it will suit Mrs. Rochester exactly; and whether she won’t look like Queen Boadicea, leaning back against those purple cushions. I wish, Jane, I were a trifle better adapted to match with her externally. Tell me now, fairy as you are,—can’t you give

me a charm, or a philter, or something of that sort, to make me a handsome man?"

"It would be past the power of magic, sir;" and, in thought, I added, "A loving eye is all the charm needed: to such you are handsome enough; or rather, your sternness has a power beyond beauty."

Mr. Rochester had sometimes read my unspoken thoughts with an acumen to me incomprehensible: in the present instance he took no notice of my abrupt vocal response; but he smiled at me with a certain smile he had of his own, and which he used but on rare occasions. He seemed to think it too good for common purposes: it was the real sunshine of feeling—he shed it over me now.

"Pass, Janet," said he, making room for me to cross the stile: "go up home, and stay your weary little wandering feet at a friend's threshold."

All I had now to do was to obey him in silence: no need for me to colloquize further. I got over the stile without a word, and meant to leave him calmly. An impulse held me fast,—a force turned me round: I said—or something in me said for me, and in spite of me:—

"Thank you, Mr. Rochester, for your great

kindness. I am strangely glad to get back again to you; and wherever you are is my home,—my only home.”

I walked on so fast that even he could hardly have overtaken me had he tried. Little Adèle was half wild with delight when she saw me. Mrs. Fairfax received me with her usual plain friendliness. Leah smiled; and even Sophie bid me “bon soir” with glee. This was very pleasant: there is no happiness like that of being loved by your fellow-creatures, and feeling that your presence is an addition to their comfort.

I, that evening, shut my eyes resolutely against the future: I stopped my ears against the voice that kept warning me of near separation and coming grief. When tea was over, and Mrs. Fairfax had taken her knitting, and I had assumed a low seat near her, and Adèle, kneeling on the carpet, had nestled close up to me, and a sense of mutual affection seemed to surround us with a ring of golden peace, I uttered a silent prayer that we might not be parted far or soon; but when, as we thus sat, Mr. Rochester entered, unannounced, and looking at us, seemed to take pleasure in the spectacle of a group so amicable—when he said he supposed the old lady was all right now

that she had got her adopted daughter back again, and added that he saw Adèle was “*prête à croquer sa petite maman Anglaise*”—I half ventured to hope that he would, even after his marriage, keep us together somewhere under the shelter of his protection, and not quite exiled from the sunshine of his presence.

A fortnight of dubious calm succeeded my return to Thornfield Hall. Nothing was said of the master's marriage, and I saw no preparation going on for such an event. Almost every day I asked Mrs. Fairfax if she had yet heard anything decided: her answer was always in the negative. Once, she said, she had actually put the question to Mr. Rochester as to when he was going to bring his bride home; but he had answered her only by a joke, and one of his queer looks, and she could not tell what to make of him.

One thing specially surprised me, and that was, there were no journeyings backward and forward, no visits to Ingram Park: to be sure it was twenty miles off, on the borders of another county; but what was that distance to an ardent lover? To so practised and indefatigable a horseman as Mr. Rochester, it would be but a morning's ride. I began to cherish hopes I had no right to conceive: that

the match was broken off; that rumour had been mistaken; that one or both parties had changed their minds. I used to look at my master's face to see if it were sad or fierce; but I could not remember the time when it had been so uniformly clear of clouds or evil feelings. If, in the moments I and my pupil spent with him, I lacked spirits and sank into inevitable dejection, he became even gay. Never had he called me more frequently to his presence; never been kinder to me when there—and, alas! never had I loved him so well.

CHAPTER VIII.

A SPLENDID Midsummer shone over England: skies so pure, suns so radiant as were then seen in long succession, seldom favour, even singly, our wave-girt land. It was as if a band of Italian days had come from the South, like a flock of glorious passenger birds, and lighted to rest them on the cliffs of Albion. The hay was all got in; the fields round Thornfield were green and shorn; the roads white and baked; the trees were in their dark prime: hedge and wood, full-leaved and deeply tinted, contrasted well with the sunny hue of the cleared meadows between.

On Midsummer-eve, Adèle, weary with gathering wild strawberries in Hay-Lane half the day, had gone to bed with the sun. I watched her drop asleep, and when I left her I sought the garden.

It was now the sweetest hour of the twenty-

four:—"Day its fervid fires had wasted," and dew fell cool on panting plain and scorched summit. Where the sun had gone down in simple state—pure of the pomp of clouds—spread a solemn purple, burning with the light of red jewel and furnace flame at one point, on one hill-peak, and extending high and wide, soft and still softer, over half heaven. The east had its own charm of fine, deep blue, and its own modest gem, a rising and solitary star: soon it would boast the moon; but she was yet beneath the horizon.

I walked awhile on the pavement; but a subtle, well-known scent—that of a cigar—stole from some window; I saw the library casement open a handbreadth; I knew I might be watched thence; so I went apart into the orchard. No nook in the grounds more sheltered and more Eden-like; it was full of trees, it bloomed with flowers: a very high wall shut it out from the court, on one side; on the other, a beech avenue screened it from the lawn. At the bottom was a sunk fence; its sole separation from lonely fields: a winding walk, bordered with laurels and terminating in a giant horse-chestnut, circled at the base by a seat, led down to the fence. Here one could wander unseen. While such honey-dew fell,

such silence reigned, such gloaming gathered, I felt as if I could haunt such shade for ever : but in threading the flower and fruit-parterres at the upper part of the enclosure, enticed there by the light the now rising-moon casts on this more open quarter, my step is stayed—not by sound, not by sight, but once more by a warning fragrance.

Sweet-briar and southern-wood, jasmine, pink, and rose have long been yielding their evening sacrifice of incense : this new scent is neither of shrub nor flower ; it is—I know it well—it is Mr. Rochester's cigar. I look round and I listen. I see trees laden with ripening fruit. I hear a nightingale warbling in a wood half a mile off ; no moving form is visible, no coming step audible ; but that perfume increases : I must flee. I make for the wicket leading to the shrubbery, and I see Mr. Rochester entering. I step aside into the ivy recess ; he will not stay long : he will soon return whence he came, and if I sit still he will never see me.

But no—eventide is as pleasant to him as to me, and this antique garden as attractive ; and he strolls on, now lifting the gooseberry-tree branches to look at the fruit, large as plums, with which they are laden ; now taking

a ripe cherry from the wall; now stooping towards a knot of flowers, either to inhale their fragrance or to admire the dew-beads on their petals. A great moth goes humming by me; it alights on a plant at Mr. Rochester's foot: he sees it, and bends to examine it.

"Now, he has his back towards me," thought I, "and he is occupied too; perhaps, if I walk softly, I can slip away unnoticed."

I trode on an edging of turf that the crackle of the pebbly gravel might not betray me: he was standing among the beds at a yard or two distant from where I had to pass; the moth apparently engaged him. "I shall get by very well," I meditated. As I crossed his shadow, thrown long over the garden by the moon, not yet risen high, he said quietly without turning:—

"Jane, come and look at this fellow."

I had made no noise: he had not eyes behind—could his shadow feel? I started at first, and then I approached him.

"Look at his wings," said he, "he reminds me rather of a West Indian insect; one does not often see so large and gay a night-rover in England: there! he is flown."

The moth roamed away; I was sheepishly retreating also: but Mr. Rochester followed

me, and when we reached the wicket, he said :—

“Turn back : on so lovely a night it is a shame to sit in the house ; and surely no one can wish to go to bed while sunset is thus at meeting with moonrise.”

It is one of my faults, that though my tongue is sometimes prompt enough at answer, there are times when it sadly fails me in framing an excuse ; and always the lapse occurs at some crisis, when a facile word or plausible pretext is specially wanted to get me out of painful embarrassment. I did not like to walk at this hour alone with Mr. Rochester in the shadowy orchard ; but I could not find a reason to allege for leaving him. I followed with lagging step, and thoughts busily bent on discovering a means of extrication ; but he himself looked so composed and so grave also, I became ashamed of feeling any confusion : the evil—if evil existent or perspective there was—seemed to lie with me only ; his mind was unconscious and quiet.

“Jane,” he recommenced, as we entered the laurel-walk, and slowly strayed down in the direction of the sunk fence and the horse-chestnut, “Thornfield is a pleasant place in summer, is it not?”

“Yes, sir.”

“You must have become in some degree attached to the house,—you, who have an eye for natural beauties, and a good deal of the organ of Adhesiveness?”

“I am attached to it, indeed.”

“And, though I don’t comprehend how it is, I perceive you have acquired a degree of regard for that foolish little child Adèle, too; and even for simple dame Fairfax?”

“Yes, sir; in different ways, I have an affection for both.”

“And would be sorry to part with them?”

“Yes.”

“Pity!” he said, and sighed and paused. “It is always the way of events in this life,” he continued presently: “no sooner have you got settled in a pleasant resting-place, than a voice calls out to you to rise and move on, for the hour of repose is expired.”

“Must I move on, sir?” I asked. “Must I leave Thornfield?”

“I believe you must, Jane. I am sorry Janet, but I believe indeed you must.”

This was a blow: but I did not let it prostrate me.

“Well, sir, I shall be ready when the order to march comes.”

“ It is come now—I must give it to-night.”

“ Then you are going to be married, sir ?”

“ Ex-act-ly—pre-cise-ly : with your usual acuteness, you have hit the nail straight on the head.”

“ Soon, sir ?”

“ Very soon, my —— that is, Miss Eyre . and you ’ll remember, Jane, the first time I, or Rumour, plainly intimated to you that it was my intention to put my old bachelor’s neck into the sacred noose, to enter into the holy estate of matrimony—to take Miss Ingram to my bosom, in short, (she ’s an extensive armful : but that ’s not to the point—one can’t have too much of such a very excellent thing as my beautiful Blanche) : well, as I was saying—listen to me Jane ! You’re not turning your head to look after more moths, are you ? That was only a lady-clock, child, ‘ flying away home.’ I wish to remind you that it was you who first said to me with that discretion, I respect in you—with that foresight, prudence, and humility which befit your responsible and dependent position—that in case I married Miss Ingram, both you and little Adèle had better trot forthwith. I pass over the sort of slur conveyed in this suggestion on the character of my beloved ; indeed, when you are far away,

Janet, I'll try to forget it : I shall notice only its wisdom ; which is such that I have made it my law of action. Adèle must go to school ; and you, Miss Eyre, must get a new situation."

"Yes, sir, I will advertise immediately : and meantime, I suppose ——" I was going to say, "I suppose I may stay here, till I find another shelter to betake myself to:" but I stopped, feeling it would not do to risk a long sentence, for my voice was not quite under command.

"In about a month I hope to be a bridegroom," continued Mr. Rochester ; "and in the interim, I shall myself look out for employment and an asylum for you."

"Thank you, sir ; I am sorry to give ——"

"Oh—no need to apologize ! I consider that when a dependant does her duty as well as you have done yours, she has a sort of claim upon her employer for any little assistance he can conveniently render her ; indeed I have already, through my future mother-in-law, heard of a place that I think will suit : it is to undertake the education of the five daughters of Mrs. Dionysius O'Gall of Bitternutt Lodge, Connaught, Ireland. You'll like Ireland, I think : they're such warm-hearted people there, they say."

“ It is a long way off, sir.”

“ No matter—a girl of your sense will not object to the voyage or the distance.”

“ Not the voyage, but the distance: and then the sea is a barrier ——”

“ From what, Jane ?”

“ From England; and from Thornfield: and ——”

“ Well?”

“ From *you*, sir.”

I said this almost involuntarily; and with as little sanction of free will, my tears gushed out. I did not cry so as to be heard, however; I avoided sobbing. The thought of Mrs. O’Gall and Bitternutt Lodge struck cold to my heart; and colder the thought of all the brine and foam, destined, as it seemed, to rush between me and the master, at whose side I now walked; and coldest at the remembrance of the wider ocean—wealth, caste, custom intervened between me and what I naturally and inevitably loved.”

“ It is a long way,” I again said.

“ It is, to be sure; and when you get to Bitternutt Lodge, Connaught, Ireland, I shall never see you again, Jane: that’s morally certain. I never go over to Ireland, not having myself much of a fancy for the country.

We have been good friends, Jane, have we not?"

"Yes, sir."

"And when friends are on the eve of separation, they like to spend the little time that remains to them close to each other. Come—we'll talk over the voyage and the parting quietly, half an hour or so, while the stars enter into their shining life up in heaven yonder: here is the chestnut tree; here is the bench at its old roots. Come, we will sit there in peace to-night, though we should never more be destined to sit there together." He seated me and himself.

"It is a long way to Ireland, Janet, and I am sorry to send my little friend on such weary travels: but if I can't do better, how is it to be helped? Are you anything akin to me, do you think, Jane?"

I could risk no sort of answer by this time: my heart was full.

"Because," he said, "I sometimes have a queer feeling with regard to you—especially when you are near me, as now: it is as if I had a string somewhere under my left ribs, tightly and inextricably knotted to a similar string situated in the corresponding quarter of your little frame. And if that boisterous

channel, and two hundred miles or so of land come broad between us, I am afraid that cord of communion will be snapt; and then I've a nervous notion I should take to bleeding inwardly. As for you,—you 'd forget me."

"That I *never* should, sir: you know ——" impossible to proceed.

"Jane, do you hear that nightingale singing in the wood?—Listen!"

In listening, I sobbed convulsively; for I could repress what I endured no longer: I was obliged to yield; and I was shaken from head to foot with acute distress. When I did speak, it was only to express an impetuous wish that I had never been born, or never come to Thornfield.

"Because you are sorry to leave it?"

The vehemence of emotion, stirred by grief and love within me, was claiming mastery, and struggling for full sway; and asserting a right to predominate: to overcome, to live, rise, and reign at last; yes,—and to speak.

"I grieve to leave Thornfield: I love Thornfield:—I love it, because I have lived in it a full and delightful life,—momentarily at least. I have not been trampled on. I have not been petrified. I have not been buried with inferior minds, and excluded from every glimpse of

communion with what is bright, and energetic, and high. I have talked, face to face, with what I reverence; with what I delight in,—with an original, a vigorous, an expanded mind. I have known you, Mr. Rochester; and it strikes me with terror and anguish to feel I absolutely must be torn from you for ever. I see the necessity of departure; and it is like looking on the necessity of death.”

“Where do you see the necessity?” he asked, suddenly.

“Where? You, sir, have placed it before me.”

“In what shape?”

“In the shape of Miss Ingram; a noble and beautiful woman,—your bride.”

“My bride! What bride? I have no bride!”

“But you will have.”

“Yes;—I will!—I will!” He set his teeth.

“Then I must go:—you have said it yourself.”

“No: you must stay! I swear it—and the oath shall be kept.”

“I tell you I must go!” I retorted, roused to something like passion. “Do you think I can stay to become nothing to you? Do you think I am an automaton?—a machine without

feelings? and can bear to have my morsel of bread snatched from my lips, and my drop of living water dashed from my cup? Do you think, because I am poor, obscure, plain, and little, I am soulless and heartless? — You think wrong! — I have as much soul as you, — and full as much heart! And if God had gifted me with some beauty, and much wealth, I should have made it as hard for you to leave me, as it is now for me to leave you. I am not talking to you now through the medium of custom, conventionalities, nor even of mortal flesh: — it is my spirit that addresses your spirit; just as if both had passed through the grave, and we stood at God's feet, equal, — as we are!”

“As we are!” repeated Mr. Rochester — “so,” he added, enclosing me in his arms, gathering me to his breast, pressing his lips on my lips: “so, Jane!”

“Yes, so, sir,” I rejoined: “and yet not so; for you are a married man — or as good as a married man, and wed to one inferior to you — to one with whom you have no sympathy — whom I do not believe you truly love; for I have seen and heard you sneer at her. I would scorn such a union; therefore I am better than you — let me go!”

“Where, Jane? To Ireland?”

“Yes—to Ireland. I have spoken my mind, and can go anywhere now.”

“Jane, be still; don’t struggle so, like a wild, frantic bird that is rending its own plumage in its desperation.”

“I am no bird; and no net ensnares me: I am a free human being with an independent will; which I now exert to leave you.”

Another effort set me at liberty, and I stood erect before him.

“And your will shall decide your destiny,” he said: “I offer you my hand, my heart, and a share of all my possessions.”

“You play a farce, which I merely laugh at.”

“I ask you to pass through life at my side—to be my second self, and best earthly companion.”

“For that fate you have already made your choice, and must abide by it.”

“Jane, be still a few moments; you are over-excited: I will be still too.”

A waft of wind came sweeping down the laurel-walk, and trembled through the boughs of the chestnut: it wandered away—away—to an indefinite distance—it died. The nightingale’s song was then the only voice of the

hour : in listening to it, I again wept. Mr. Rochester sat quiet, looking at me gently and seriously. Some time passed before he spoke ; he at last said :—

“Come to my side, Jane, and let us explain and understand one another.”

“I will never again come to your side : I am torn away now, and cannot return.”

“But, Jane, I summon you as my wife : it is you only I intend to marry.”

I was silent : I thought he mocked me.

“Come, Jane—come hither.”

“Your bride stands between us.”

He rose, and with a stride reached me.

“My bride is here,” he said, again drawing me to him, “because my equal is here, and my likeness. Jane, will you marry me?”

Still I did not answer ; and still I writhed myself from his grasp : for I was still incredulous.

“Do you doubt me, Jane?”

“Entirely.”

“You have no faith in me?”

“Not a whit.”

“Am I a liar in your eyes?” he asked passionately. “Little sceptic, you *shall* be convinced. What love have I for Miss Ingram? None : and that you know. What

love has she for me? None; as I have taken pains to prove: I caused a rumour to reach her that my fortune was not a third of what was supposed, and after that I presented myself to see the result: it was coldness both from her and her mother. I would not—I could not—marry Miss Ingram. You—you strange—you almost unearthly thing!—I love as my own flesh. You—poor and obscure, and small and plain as you are—I entreat to accept me as a husband.”

“What, me!” I ejaculated: beginning in his earnestness—and especially in his incivility—to credit his sincerity; “me, who have not a friend in the world but you—if you are my friend: not a shilling but what you have given me?”

“You, Jane. I must have you for my own—entirely my own. Will you be mine? Say yes, quickly.”

“Mr. Rochester, let me look at your face: turn to the moonlight.”

“Why?”

“Because I want to read your countenance: turn!”

“There: you will find it scarcely more legible than a crumpled, scratched page. Read on: only make haste, for I suffer.”

His face was very much agitated and very much flushed, and there were strong workings in the features, and strange gleams in the eyes.

“ Oh, Jane, you torture me !” he exclaimed. “ With that searching and yet faithful and generous look, you torture me !”

“ How can I do that ? If you are true, and your offer real, my only feelings to you must be gratitude and devotion—they cannot torture.”

“ Gratitude !” he ejaculated ; and added wildly—“ Jane, accept me quickly. Say, Edward—give me my name—Edward, I will marry you.”

“ Are you in earnest ?—Do you truly love me ?—Do you sincerely wish me to be your wife ?”

“ I do ; and if an oath is necessary to satisfy you, I swear it.”

“ Then, sir, I will marry you.”

“ Edward—my little wife !”

“ Dear Edward !”

“ Come to me—come to me entirely now,” said he ; and added, in his deepest tone, speaking in my ear as his cheek was laid on mine, “ Make my happiness—I will make yours.”

“ God pardon me !” he subjoined ere long ;

“and man meddle not with me: I have her, and will hold her.”

“There is no one to meddle, sir. I have no kindred to interfere.”

“No—that is the best of it,” he said. And if I had loved him less I should have thought his accent and look of exultation savage: but, sitting by him, roused from the nightmare of parting—called to the paradise of union—I thought only of the bliss given me to drink in so abundant a flow. Again and again he said, “Are you happy, Jane?” And again and again I answered, “Yes.” After which he murmured, “It will atone — it will atone. Have I not found her friendless, and cold, and comfortless? Will I not guard, and cherish, and solace her? Is there not love in my heart, and constancy in my resolves? It will expiate at God’s tribunal. I know my Maker sanctions what I do. For the world’s judgment—I wash my hands thereof. For man’s opinion—I defy it.”

But what had befallen the night? The moon was not yet set, and we were all in shadow: I could scarcely see my master’s face, near as I was. And what ailed the chestnut tree? it writhed and groaned; while wind roared in the laurel walk, and came sweeping over us.

“ We must go in,” said Mr. Rochester: “ the weather changes. I could have sat with thee till morning, Jane.”

“ And so,” thought I, “ could I with you.” I should have said so, perhaps, but a livid, vivid spark leapt out of a cloud at which I was looking, and there was a crack, a crash, and a close rattling peal; and I thought only of hiding my dazzled eyes against Mr. Rochester’s shoulder. The rain rushed down. He hurried me up the walk, through the grounds, and into the house; but we were quite wet before we could pass the threshold. He was taking off my shawl in the hall, and shaking the water out of my loosened hair, when Mrs. Fairfax emerged from her room. I did not observe her at first, nor did Mr. Rochester. The lamp was lit. The clock was on the stroke of twelve.

“ Hasten to take of your wet things,” said he; “ and before you go, good-night—good-night, my darling !”

He kissed me repeatedly. When I looked up, on leaving his arms, there stood the widow, pale, grave, and amazed. I only smiled at her, and ran up stairs. “ Explanation will do for another time,” thought I. Still, when I reached my chamber, I felt a pang at the idea

she should even temporarily misconstrue what she had seen. But joy soon effaced every other feeling; and loud as the wind blew, near and deep as the thunder crashed, fierce and frequent as the lightning gleamed, cataract-like as the rain fell during a storm of two hours' duration, I experienced no fear, and little awe. Mr. Rochester came thrice to my door in the course of it, to ask if I was safe and tranquil: and that was comfort, that was strength for anything.

Before I left my bed in the morning, little Adèle came running in to tell me that the great horse-chestnut at the bottom of the orchard had been struck by lightning in the night, and half of it split away.

CHAPTER IX.

As I rose and dressed, I thought over what had happened, and wondered if it were a dream. I could not be certain of the reality till I had seen Mr. Rochester again, and heard him renew his words of love and promise.

While arranging my hair, I looked at my face in the glass, and felt it was no longer plain : there was hope in its aspect, and life in its colour ; and my eyes seemed as if they had beheld the fount of fruition, and borrowed beams from the lustrous ripple. I had often been unwilling to look at my master, because I feared he could not be pleased at my look ; but I was sure I might lift my face to his now, and not cool his affection by its expression. I took a plain but clean and light summer dress from my drawer and put it on : it seemed no attire had ever so well become me ; because none had I ever worn in so blissful a mood.

I was not surprised, when I ran down into the hall, to see that a brilliant June morning had succeeded to the tempest of the night; and to feel, through the open glass door, the breathing of a fresh and fragrant breeze. Nature must be gladsome when I was so happy. A beggar-woman and her little boy—pale, ragged objects both—were coming up the walk, and I ran down and gave them all the money I happened to have in my purse—some three or four shillings: good or bad, they must partake of my jubilee. The rooks cawed, and blither birds sang; but nothing was so merry or so musical as my own rejoicing heart.

Mrs. Fairfax surprised me by looking out of the window with a sad countenance, and saying gravely:—"Miss Eyre, will you come to breakfast?" During the meal she was quiet and cool: but I could not undeceive her then. I must wait for my master to give explanations; and so must she. I ate what I could, and then I hastened up stairs. I met Adèle leaving the school-room.

"Where are you going? It is time for lessons."

"Mr. Rochester has sent me away to the nursery."

"Where is he?"

“In there,” pointing to the apartment she had left; and I went in, and there he stood.

“Come and bid me good-morning,” said he. I gladly advanced; and it was not merely a cold word now, or even a shake of the hand that I received, but an embrace and a kiss. It seemed natural: it seemed genial to be so well-loved, so caressed by him.

“Jane, you look blooming, and smiling, and pretty,” said he: “truly pretty this morning. Is this my pale, little elf? Is this my mustard-seed? This little sunny-faced girl with the dimpled cheek and rosy lips; the satin-smooth hazel hair, and the radiant hazel eyes?” (I had green eyes, reader; but you must excuse the mistake: for him they were new-dyed, I suppose.)

“It is Jane Eyre, sir.”

“Soon to be Jane Rochester,” he added: “in four weeks, Janet; not a day more. Do you hear that?”

I did; and I could not quite comprehend it: it made me giddy. The feeling, the announcement sent through me, was something stronger than was consistent with joy—something that smote and stunned: it was, I think, almost fear.

“ You blushed, and now you are white, Jane : what is that for ? ”

“ Because you gave me a new name—Jane Rochester ; and it seems so strange. ”

“ Yes ; Mrs. Rochester, ” said he ; “ young Mrs. Rochester—Fairfax Rochester’s girl-bride. ”

“ It can never be, sir : it does not sound likely. Human beings never enjoy complete happiness in this world. I was not born for a different destiny to the rest of my species : to imagine such a lot befalling me, is a fairy tale—a day-dream. ”

“ Which I can and will realize. I shall begin to-day. This morning I wrote to my banker in London to send me certain jewels he has in his keeping,—heir-looms for the ladies of Thornfield. In a day or two I hope to pour them into your lap : for every privilege, every attention shall be yours, that I would accord a peer’s daughter, if about to marry her. ”

“ Oh, sir !—never mind jewels ! I don’t like to hear them spoken of. Jewels for Jane Eyre sounds unnatural and strange : I would rather not have them. ”

“ I will myself put the diamond chain round your neck, and the circlet on your forehead,—

which it will become: for nature, at least, has stamped her patent of nobility on this brow, Jane; and I will clasp the bracelets on these fine wrists, and load these fairy-like fingers with rings."

"No, no, sir! think of other subjects, and speak of other things; and in another strain. Don't address me as if I were a beauty: I am your plain, Quakerish governess."

"You are a beauty, in my eyes; and a beauty just after the desire of my heart,—delicate and ærial."

"Puny and insignificant, you mean. You are dreaming, sir—or you are sneering. For God's sake, don't be ironical!"

"I will make the world acknowledge you a beauty, too," he went on, while I really became uneasy at the strain he had adopted; because I felt he was either deluding himself, or trying to delude me. "I will attire my Jane in satin and lace, and she shall have roses in her hair; and I will cover the head I love best with a priceless veil."

"And then you won't know me, sir; and I shall not be your Jane Eyre any longer, but an ape in a harlequin's jacket,—a jay in borrowed plumes. I would as soon see you, Mr. Rochester, tricked out in stage-trappings,

as myself clad in a court-lady's robe; and I don't call you handsome, sir, though I love you most dearly: far too dearly to flatter you. Don't flatter me."

He pursued his theme, however, without noticing my deprecation. "This very day I shall take you in the carriage to Millcote, and you must choose some dresses for yourself. I told you we shall be married in four weeks. The wedding is to take place quietly, in the church down below yonder; and then I shall waft you away at once to town. After a brief stay there, I shall bear my treasure to regions nearer the sun: to French vineyards and Italian plains; and she shall see whatever is famous in old story and in modern record: she shall taste, too, of the life of cities; and she shall learn to value herself by just comparison with others."

"Shall I travel?—and with you, sir?"

"You shall sojourn at Paris, Rome, and Naples; at Florence, Venice, and Vienna: all the ground I have wandered over shall be re-trodden by you: wherever I stamped my hoof, your sylph's foot shall step also. Ten years since, I flew through Europe half mad; with disgust, hate, and rage, as my companions: now I shall revisit it healed

and cleansed, with a very angel as my comforter."

I laughed at him as he said this. "I am not an angel," I asserted; "and I will not be one till I die: I will be myself. Mr. Rochester, you must neither expect nor exact anything celestial of me,—for you will not get it, any more than I shall get it of you; which I do not at all anticipate."

"What do you anticipate of me?"

"For a little while you will perhaps be as you are now,—a very little while; and then you will turn cool; and then you will be capricious; and then you will be stern, and I shall have much ado to please you: but when you get well used to me, you will perhaps like me again,—*like* me, I say, not *love* me. I suppose your love will effervesce in six months, or less. I have observed in books written by men, that period assigned as the farthest to which a husband's ardour extends. Yet, after all, as a friend and companion, I hope never to become quite distasteful to my dear master."

"Distasteful! and like you again! I think I shall like you again and yet again: and I will make you confess I do not only *like*, but *love* you—with truth, fervour, constancy."

"Yet are you not capricious, sir?"

“To women who please me only by their faces, I am the very devil when I find out they have neither souls nor hearts—when they open to me a perspective of flatness, triviality, and perhaps imbecility, coarseness, and ill-temper: but to the clear eye and eloquent tongue, to the soul made of fire, and the character that bends but does not break—at once supple and stable, tractable and consistent—I am ever tender and true.”

“Had you ever experience of such a character, sir? Did you ever love such a one?”

“I love it now.”

“But before me: if I, indeed, in any respect come up to that difficult standard?”

“I never met your likeness, Jane: you please me, and you master me—you seem to submit, and I like the sense of pliancy you impart; and while I am twining the soft, silken skein round my finger, it sends a thrill up my arm to my heart. I am influenced—conquered; and the influence is sweeter than I can express; and the conquest I undergo has a witchery beyond any triumph I can win. Why do you smile, Jane? What does that inexplicable, that uncanny turn of countenance mean?”

“I was thinking, sir (you will excuse the

idea ; it was involuntary), I was thinking of Hercules and Samson with their charmers—”

“ You were, you little, elfish——”

“ Hush, sir ! You don't talk very wisely just now ; any more than those gentlemen acted very wisely. However, had they been married, they would no doubt by their severity as husbands have made up for their softness as suitors : and so will you, I fear. I wonder how you will answer me a year hence, should I ask a favour it does not suit your convenience or pleasure to grant.”

“ Ask me something now, Janet—the least thing : I desire to be entreated——”

“ Indeed, I will sir ; I have my petition all ready.”

“ Speak ! But if you look up and smile with that countenance, I shall swear concession before I know to what, and that will make a fool of me.”

“ Not at all, sir ; I ask only this : don't send for the jewels, and don't crown me with roses : you might as well put a border of gold lace round that plain pocket handkerchief you have there.”

“ I might as well ‘ gild refined gold.’ I know it : your request is granted then—for the time. I will remand the order I despatched

to my banker. But you have not yet asked for anything; you have prayed a gift to be withdrawn: try again."

"Well, then, sir; have the goodness to gratify my curiosity, which is much piqued on one point."

He looked disturbed. "What? what?" he said hastily. "Curiosity is a dangerous petitioner: it is well I have not taken a vow to accord every request——"

"But there can be no danger in complying with this, sir."

"Utter it, Jane: but I wish that instead of a mere inquiry into, perhaps, a secret, it was a wish for half my estate."

"Now, king Ahasuerus! What do I want with half your estate? Do you think I am a Jew-usurer, seeking good investment in land? I would much rather have all your confidence. You will not exclude me from your confidence, if you admit me to your heart?"

"You are welcome to all of my confidence that is worth having, Jane: but for God's sake, don't desire a useless burden! Don't long for poison—don't turn out a downright Eve on my hands!"

"Why not, sir? You have just been telling

me how much you like to be conquered, and, how pleasant overpersuasion is to you. Don't you think I had better take advantage of the confession, and begin and coax, and entreat—even cry and be sulky if necessary—for the sake of a mere essay of my power?"

"I dare you to any such experiment. Encroach, presume, and the game is up."

"Is it, sir? You soon give in. How stern you look now! Your eyebrows have become as thick as my finger, and your forehead resembles, what, in some very astonishing poetry, I once saw styled, 'a blue-piled thunder-loft.' That will be your married look, sir, I suppose?"

"If that will be *your* married look, I, as a Christian, will soon give up the notion of consorting with a mere sprite or salamander. But what had you to ask, thing?—out with it!"

"There, you are less than civil now; and I like rudeness a great deal better than flattery. I had rather be a *thing* than an angel. This is what I have to ask,—Why did you take such pains to make me believe you wished to marry Miss Ingram?"

"Is that all? Thank God, it is no worse!" And now he unknit his black brows; looked

down, smiling at me, and stroked my hair, as if well pleased at seeing a danger averted. "I think I may confess," he continued, "even although I should make you a little indignant, Jane—and I have seen what a fire-spirit you can be when you are indignant. You glowed in the cool moonlight last night, when you mutinied against fate, and claimed your rank as my equal. Janet, by-the-by, it was you who made me the offer."

"Of course I did. But to the point if you please, sir—Miss Ingram?"

"Well, I feigned courtship of Miss Ingram, because I wished to render you as madly in love with me as I was with you; and I knew jealousy would be the best ally I could call in for the furtherance of that end."

"Excellent! Now you are small—not one whit bigger than the end of my little finger. It was a burning shame, and a scandalous disgrace to act in that way. Did you think nothing of Miss Ingram's feelings, sir?"

"Her feelings are concentrated in one—pride; and that needs humbling. Were you jealous, Jane?"

"Never mind, Mr. Rochester: it is in no way interesting to you to know that. Answer me truly once more. Do you think

Miss Ingram will not suffer from your dishonest coquetry? Won't she feel forsaken and deserted?"

"Impossible!—when I told you how she, on the contrary, deserted me: the idea of my insolvency, cooled, or rather extinguished, her flame in a moment."

"You have a curious designing mind, Mr. Rochester. I am afraid your principles on some points are eccentric."

"My principles were never trained, Jane: they may have grown a little awry for want of attention."

"Once again, seriously; may I enjoy the great good that has been vouchsafed to me, without fearing that any one else is suffering the bitter pain I myself felt a while ago?"

"That you may, my good little girl: there is not another being in the world has the same pure love for me as yourself—for I lay that pleasant unction to my soul, Jane, a belief in your affection."

I turned my lips to the hand that lay on my shoulder. I loved him very much—more than I could trust myself to say—more than words had power to express.

"Ask something more," he said presently;

“it is my delight to be entreated, and to yield.”

I was again ready with my request. “Communicate your intentions to Mrs. Fairfax, sir: she saw me with you last night in the hall, and she was shocked. Give her some explanation before I see her again. It pains me to be misjudged by so good a woman.”

“Go to your room, and put on your bonnet,” he replied. “I mean you to accompany me to Millcote this morning; and while you prepare for the drive, I will enlighten the old lady’s understanding. Did she think, Janet, you had given the world for love, and considered it well lost?”

“I believe she thought I had forgotten my station; and yours, sir.”

“Station! station!—your station is in my heart, and on the necks of those who would insult you, now or hereafter.—Go.”

I was soon dressed; and when I heard Mr. Rochester quit Mrs. Fairfax’s parlour, I hurried down to it. The old lady had been reading her morning portion of Scripture—the lesson for the day: her Bible lay open before her, and her spectacles were upon it. Her occupation, suspended by Mr. Rochester’s announcement, seemed now forgotten: her

eyes, fixed on the blank wall opposite, expressed the surprise of a quiet mind, stirred by unwonted tidings. Seeing me, she roused herself: she made a sort of effort to smile, and framed a few words of congratulation; but the smile expired, and the sentence was abandoned unfinished. She put up her spectacles, shut the Bible, and pushed her chair back from the table.

“I feel so astonished,” she began, “I hardly know what to say to you, Miss Eyre. I have surely not been dreaming, have I? Sometimes I half fall asleep when I am sitting alone, and fancy things that have never happened. It has seemed to me more than once, when I have been in a doze, that my dear husband, who died fifteen years since, has come in and sat down beside me; and that I have even heard him call me by my name, Alice, as he used to do. Now, can you tell me whether it is actually true that Mr. Rochester has asked you to marry him? Don’t laugh at me. But I really thought he came in here five minutes ago, and said, that in a month you would be his wife.”

“He has said the same thing to me,” I replied.

“He has! Do you believe him? Have you accepted him?”

“Yes.”

She looked at me bewildered.

“I could never have thought it. He is a proud man: all the Rochesters were proud: and his father, at least, liked money. He, too, has always been called careful. He means to marry you?”

“He tells me so.”

She surveyed my whole person: in her eyes I read that they had there found no charm powerful enough to solve the enigma.

“It passes me!” she continued: “but no doubt it is true, since you say so. How it will answer, I cannot tell: I really don’t know. Equality of position and fortune is often advisable in such cases; and there are twenty years of difference in your ages. He might almost be your father.”

“No, indeed, Mrs. Fairfax!” exclaimed I, nettled; “he is nothing like my father! No one, who saw us together, would suppose it for an instant. Mr. Rochester looks as young, and is as young as some men at five-and-twenty.”

“Is it really for love he is going to marry you?” she asked.

I was so hurt by her coldness and scepticism, that the tears rose to my eyes.

“I am sorry to grieve you,” pursued the widow; “but you are so young, and so little acquainted with men, I wished to put you on your guard. It is an old saying that ‘all is not gold that glitters;’ and in this case I do fear there will be something found to be different to what either you or I expect.”

“Why?—am I a monster?” I said: “is it impossible that Mr. Rochester should have a sincere affection for me?”

“No: you are very well; and much improved of late; and Mr. Rochester, I dare say, is fond of you. I have always noticed that you were a sort of pet of his. There are times when, for your sake, I have been a little uneasy at his marked preference, and have wished to put you on your guard: but I did not like to suggest even the possibility of wrong. I knew such an idea would shock, perhaps offend you; and you were so discreet, and so thoroughly modest and sensible, I hoped you might be trusted to protect yourself. Last night I cannot tell you what I suffered when I sought all over the house, and could find you nowhere, nor the master either; and then, at twelve o’clock, saw you come in with him.”

“Well, never mind that now,” I interrupted, impatiently: “it is enough that all was right.”

“I hope all will be right in the end,” she said: “but, believe me, you cannot be too careful. Try and keep Mr. Rochester at a distance: distrust yourself as well as him. Gentlemen in his station are not accustomed to marry their governesses.”

I was growing truly irritated: happily, Adèle ran in.

“Let me go,—let me go to Millcote, too!” she cried. “Mr. Rochester won’t; though there is so much room in the new carriage. Beg him to let me go, mademoiselle.”

“That I will, Adèle;” and I hastened away with her, glad to quit my gloomy mistress. The carriage was ready: they were bringing it round to the front, and my master was pacing the pavement, Pilot following him backwards and forwards.

“Adèle may accompany us, may she not, sir?”

“I told her no. I’ll have no brats!—I’ll have only you.”

“Do let her go, Mr. Rochester, if you please: it would be better.”

“Not it: she will be a restraint.”

He was quite peremptory, both in look and voice. The chill of Mrs. Fairfax's warnings, and the damp of her doubts, were upon me: something of unsubstantiality and uncertainty had beset my hopes. I half lost the sense of power over him. I was about mechanically to obey him, without further remonstrance; but as he helped me into the carriage, he looked at my face.

“What is the matter?” he asked; “all the sunshine is gone. Do you really wish the bairn to go? Will it annoy you if she is left behind?”

“I would far rather she went, sir.”

“Then off for your bonnet, and back, like a flash of lightning!” cried he to Adèle.

She obeyed him with what speed she might.

“After all, a single morning's interruption will not matter much,” said he, “when I mean shortly to claim you—your thoughts, conversation, and company—for life.”

Adèle, when lifted in, commenced kissing me, by way of expressing her gratitude for my intercession: she was instantly stowed away into a corner on the other side of him. She then peeped round to where I sat; so stern a neighbour was too restrictive: to

him, in his present fractious mood, she dared whisper no observations, nor ask of him any information.

“Let her come to me,” I entreated; “she will, perhaps, trouble you, sir: there is plenty of room on this side.”

He handed her over as if she had been a lap-dog: “I’ll send her to school yet,” he said, but now he was smiling.

Adèle heard him, and asked if she was to go to school “sans mademoiselle?”

“Yes,” he replied, “absolutely sans mademoiselle; for I am to take mademoiselle to the moon, and there I shall seek a cave in one of the white valleys among the volcano-tops, and mademoiselle shall live with me there, and only me.”

“She will have nothing to eat: you will starve her,” observed Adèle.

“I shall gather manna for her morning and night: the plains and hill-sides in the moon are bleached with manna, Adèle.”

“She will want to warm herself; what will she do for a fire?”

“Fire rises out of the lunar mountains: when she is cold, I’ll carry her up to a peak and lay her down on the edge of a crater.”

“Oh, qu’elle y sera mal—peu comfortable!

And her clothes, they will wear out : how can she get new ones ?”

Mr. Rochester professed to be puzzled. “Hem !” said he. “What would you do, Adèle ? Cudgel your brains for an expedient. How would a white or a pink cloud answer for a gown, do you think ? And one could cut a pretty enough scarf out of a rainbow.”

“She is far better as she is,” concluded Adèle, after musing some time : “besides, she would get tired of living with only you in the moon. If I were mademoiselle, I would never consent to go with you.”

“She has consented : she has pledged her word.”

“But you can’t get her there : there is no road to the moon : it is all air ; and neither you nor she can fly.”

“Adèle, look at that field.” We were now outside Thornfield gates, and bowling lightly along the smooth road to Millcote, where the dust was well laid by the thunder-storm, and where the low hedges and lofty timber trees on each side glistened green, and rain-refreshed.

“In that field, Adèle, I was walking late one evening about a fortnight since—the evening of the day you helped me to make hay

in the orchard meadows; and as I was tired with raking swaths, I sat down to rest me on a stile; and there I took out a little book and a pencil, and began to write about a misfortune that befell me long ago, and a wish I had for happy days to come: I was writing away very fast, though daylight was fading from the leaf, when something came up the path and stopped two yards off me. I looked at it. It was a little thing with a veil of gossamer on its head. I beckoned it to come near me: it stood soon at my knee. I never spoke to it, and it never spoke to me, in words: but I read its eyes, and it read mine; and our speechless colloquy was to this effect:—

“It was a fairy, and come from Elf-land, it said; and its errand was to make me happy: I must go with it out of the common world to a lonely place—such as the moon, for instance—and it nodded its head towards her horn, rising over Hay-hill: it told me of the alabaster cave and silver vale where we might live. I said I should like to go; but reminded it, as you did me, that I had no wings to fly.

“‘Oh,’ returned the fairy, ‘that does not signify! Here is a talisman will remove all difficulties;’ and she held out a pretty gold

ring. 'Put it,' she said, 'on the fourth finger of my left hand, and I am yours, and you are mine; and we shall leave earth, and make our own heaven yonder.' She nodded again at the moon. The ring, Adèle, is in my breeches-pocket, under the disguise of a sovereign: but I mean soon to change it to a ring again."

"But what has mademoiselle to do with it? I don't care for the fairy: you said it was mademoiselle you would take to the moon ——?"

"Mademoiselle is a fairy," he said, whispering mysteriously. Whereupon I told her not to mind his badinage; and she, on her part, evinced a fund of genuine French scepticism: denominating Mr. Rochester "un vrai menteur," and assuring him that she made no account whatever of his "Contes de fée," and that "du reste, il n'y avait pas de fées, et quand même il y en avait:" she was sure they would never appear to him, nor ever give him rings, or offer to live with him in the moon.

The hour spent at Millcote was a somewhat harassing one to me. Mr. Rochester obliged me to go to a certain silk warehouse: there I was ordered to choose half a dozen dresses. I hated the business, I begged leave to defer it:

no—it should be gone through with now. By dint of entreaties expressed in energetic whispers, I reduced the half-dozen to two: these, however, he vowed he would select himself. With anxiety I watched his eye rove over the gay stores: he fixed on a rich silk of the most brilliant amethyst dye, and a superb pink satin. I told him in a new series of whispers, that he might as well buy me a gold gown and a silver bonnet at once: I should certainly never venture to wear his choice. With infinite difficulty, (for he was stubborn as a stone) I persuaded him to make an exchange in favour of a sober black satin and pearl-grey silk. “It might pass for the present,” he said; “but he would yet see me glittering like a parterre.”

Glad was I to get him out of the silk warehouse, and then out of a jeweller’s shop: the more he bought me, the more my cheek burned with a sense of annoyance and degradation. As we re-entered the carriage, and I sat back feverish and fagged, I remembered what in the hurry of events, dark and bright, I had wholly forgotten—the letter of my uncle, John Eyre, to Mrs. Reed: his intention to adopt me and make me his testatrix. “It would, indeed, be a relief,” I thought, “if I had ever so small an independency; I never

can bear being dressed like a doll by Mr. Rochester, or sitting like a second Danae with the golden shower falling daily round me. I will write to Madeira the moment I get home, and tell my uncle John I am going to be married, and to whom : if I had but a prospect of one day bringing Mr. Rochester an accession of fortune, I could better endure to be kept by him now." And somewhat relieved by this idea (which I failed not to execute that day), I ventured once more to meet my master's and lover's eye ; which most pertinaciously sought mine, though I averted both face and gaze. He smiled ; and I thought his smile was such as a sultan might, in a blissful and fond moment, bestow on a slave his gold and gems had enriched : I crushed his hand, which was ever hunting mine, vigorously, and thrust it back to him red with the passionate pressure——

" You need not look in that way," I said : " if you do, I'll wear nothing but my old Lowood frocks to the end of the chapter. I'll be married in this lilac gingham—you may make a dressing-gown for yourself out of the pearl-grey silk, and an infinite series of waistcoats out of the black satin."

He chuckled ; he rubbed his hands : " Oh,

it is rich to see and hear her ! ” he exclaimed. “ Is she original ? Is she piquant ? I would not exchange this one little English girl for the grand Turk’s whole seraglio ; gazelle-eyes, houri forms and all ! ”

The eastern allusion bit me again : “ I ’ll not stand you an inch in the stead of a seraglio,” I said ; “ so don’t consider me an equivalent for one : if you have a fancy for anything in that line, away with you, sir, to the bazars of Stamboul without delay ; and lay out in extensive slave-purchases some of that spare cash you seem at a loss to spend satisfactorily here.”

“ And what will you do, Janet, while I am bargaining for so many tons of flesh and such an assortment of black eyes ? ”

“ I ’ll be preparing myself to go out as a missionary to preach liberty to them that are enslaved—your Harem inmates amongst the rest. I ’ll get admitted there, and I ’ll stir up mutiny ; and you, three-tailed bashaw as you are, sir, shall in a trice find yourself fettered amongst our hands : nor will I, for one, consent to cut your bonds till you have signed a charter, the most liberal that despot ever yet conferred.”

“ I would consent to be at your mercy, Jane.”

“ I would have no mercy, Mr. Rochester, if you supplicated for it with an eye like that. While you looked so, I should be certain that whatever charter you might grant under coercion, your first act, when released, would be to violate its conditions.”

“ Why, Jane, what would you have? I fear you will compel me to go through a private marriage ceremony, besides that performed at the altar. You will stipulate, I see, for peculiar terms — what will they be ?”

“ I only want an easy mind, sir; not crushed by crowded obligations. Do you remember what you said of Céline Varens?— of the diamonds, the cashmeres you gave her? I will not be your English Céline Varens. I shall continue to act as Adèle’s governess: by that I shall earn my board and lodging, and thirty pounds a year besides. I’ll furnish my own wardrobe out of that money, and you shall give me nothing, but—”

“ Well, but what ?”

“ Your regard: and if I give you mine in return, that debt will be quit.”

“ Well, for cool native impudence, and pure innate pride, you havn’t your equal,” said he. We were now approaching Thornfield. “ Will

it please you to dine with me to-day?" he asked, as we re-entered the gates.

"No, thank you, sir."

"And what for, 'no, thank you'? if one may inquire."

"I never have dined with you, sir; and I see no reason why I should now: till—"

"Till what? You delight in half phrases."

"Till I can't help it."

"Do you suppose I eat like an ogre, or a ghoul, that you dread being the companion of my repast?"

"I have formed no suppositions on the subject, sir: but I want to go on as usual for another month."

"You will give up your governessing slavery at once."

"Indeed! begging your pardon, sir, I shall not. I shall just go on with it as usual. I shall keep out of your way all day, as I have been accustomed to do: you may send for me in the evening, when you feel disposed to see me, and I'll come then; but at no other time."

"I want a smoke, Jane, or a pinch of snuff, to comfort me under all this 'pour me donner une contenance,' as Adèle would say; and unfortunately I have neither my cigar-case, nor

my snuff-box. But listen—whisper—it is your time now, little tyrant, but it will be mine presently; and when once I have fairly seized you, to have and to hold, I'll just—figuratively speaking—attach you to a chain like this (touching his watch-guard). Yes, bonny wee thing, I'll wear you in my bosom, lest my jewel I should tyne."

He said this as he helped me to alight from the carriage; and while he afterwards lifted out Adèle, I entered the house, and made good my retreat up stairs.

He duly summoned me to his presence in the evening. I had prepared an occupation for him; for I was determined not to spend the whole time in a *tête-à-tête* conversation: I remembered his fine voice; I knew he liked to sing — good singers generally do. I was no vocalist myself, and in his fastidious judgment, no musician, either; but I delighted in listening when the performance was good. No sooner had twilight, that hour of romance, begun to lower her blue and starry banner over the lattice, than I rose, opened the piano, and entreated him, for the love of heaven, to give me a song. He said I was a capricious witch, and that he would rather

sing another time ; but I averred that no time was like the present.

“ Did I like his voice ? ” he asked.

“ Very much.” I was not fond of pampering that susceptible vanity of his ; but for once, and from motives of expediency, I would e’en soothe and stimulate it.

“ Then, Jane, you must play the accompaniment.”

“ Very well, sir, I will try.”

I did try, but was presently swept off the stool and denominated, “ a little bungler.” Being pushed unceremoniously to one side—which was precisely what I wished—he usurped my place, and proceeded to accompany himself ; for he could play as well as sing. I hied me to the window-recess ; and while I sat there and looked out on the still trees and dim lawn, to a sweet air was sung in mellow tones, the following strain :—

The truest love that ever heart
 Felt at its kindled core
 Did through each vein, in quickened start,
 The tide of being pour.

Her coming was my hope each day,
 Her parting was my pain ;
 The chance that did her steps delay,
 Was ice in every vein.

I dreamed it would be nameless bliss,
As I loved, loved to be ;
And to this object did I press ,
As blind as eagerly.

But wide as pathless was the space
That lay, our lives, between,
And dangerous as the foamy race
Of ocean-surges green.

And haunted as a robber-path
Through wilderness or wood ;
For Might and Right, and Woe and Wrath,
Between our spirits stood.

I dangers dared ; I hindrance scorned ;
I omens did defy :
Whatever menaced, harassed, warned,
I passed impetuous by.

On sped my rainbow, fast as light ;
I flew as in a dream ;
Far glorious rose upon my sight
That child of Shower and Gleam.

Still bright on clouds of suffering dim
Shines that soft, solemn joy ;
Nor care I now, how dense and grim
Disasters gather nigh :

I care not in this moment sweet,
Though all I have rushed o'er
Should come on pinion, strong and fleet,
Proclaiming vengeance sore :

Though haughty Hate should strike me down,
Right, bar approach to me,
And grinding Might, with furious frown,
Swear endless enmity.

My Love has placed her little hand
With noble faith in mine,
And vowed that wedlock's sacred band
Our natures shall entwine.

My Love has sworn, with sealing kiss,
With me to live—to die ;
I have at last my nameless bliss :
As I love—loved am I !

He rose and came towards me, and I saw his face all kindled, and his full falcon-eye flashing, and tenderness and passion in every lineament. I quailed momentarily—then I rallied. Soft scene, daring demonstration, I would not have ; and I stood in peril of both : a weapon of defence must be prepared—I whetted my tongue : as he reached me, I asked with asperity, “whom he was going to marry now ?”

“That was a strange question to be put by his darling Jane.”

“Indeed ! I considered it a very natural and necessary one : he had talked of his future wife dying with him. What did he mean by

such a pagan idea? *I* had no intention of dying with him—he might depend on that.”

“Oh, all he longed, all he prayed for, was that I might live with him! Death was not for such as I.”

“Indeed it was: I had as good a right to die when my time came as he had: but I should bide that time, and not be hurried away in a suttee.”

“Would I forgive him for the selfish idea, and prove my pardon by a reconciling kiss?”

“No: I would rather be excused.”

Here I heard myself apostrophized as a “hard little thing;” and it was added, “any other woman would have been melted to marrow at hearing such stanzas crooned in her praise.”

I assured him I was naturally hard—very flinty, and that he would often find me so; and that, moreover, I was determined to show him divers rugged points in my character before the ensuing four weeks elapsed: he should know fully what sort of a bargain he had made, while there was yet time to rescind it.

“Would I be quiet, and talk rationally?”

“I would be quiet if he liked; and as to talking rationally, I flattered myself I was doing that now.”

He fretted, pished and pshawed. "Very good," I thought; "you may fume and fidget as you please: but this is the best plan to pursue with you, I am certain. I like you more than I can say; but I'll not sink into a bathos of sentiment: and with this needle of repartee I'll keep you from the edge of the gulph too; and, moreover, maintain by its pungent aid that distance between you and myself most conducive to our real mutual advantage."

From less to more, I worked him up to considerable irritation; then, after he had retired, in dudgeon, quite to the other end of the room, I got up, and saying, "I wish you good-night, sir," in my natural and wonted respectful manner, I slipped out by the side-door and got away.

The system thus entered on, I pursued during the whole season of probation; and with the best success. He was kept, to be sure, rather cross and crusty: but on the whole I could see he was excellently entertained; and that a lamb-like submission and turtle-dove sensibility, while fostering his despotism more, would have pleased his judgment, satisfied his common-sense, and even suited his taste, less.

In other people's presence I was, as formerly,

deferential and quiet ; any other line of conduct being uncalled-for : it was only in the evening conferences I thus thwarted and afflicted him. He continued to send for me punctually the moment the clock struck seven ; though when I appeared before him now, he had no such honeyed terms as "love" and "darling" on his lips : the best words at my service were "provoking puppet," "malicious elf," "sprite," "changeling," &c. For caresses too, I now got grimaces ; for a pressure of the hand, a pinch on the arm : for a kiss on the cheek, a severe tweak of the ear. It was all right : at present I decidedly preferred these fierce favours to anything more tender. Mrs. Fairfax, I saw approved me : her anxiety on my account vanished ; therefore I was certain I did well. Meantime, Mr. Rochester affirmed I was wearing him to skin and bone, and threatened awful vengeance for my present conduct at some period fast coming. I laughed in my sleeve at his menaces : "I can keep you in reasonable check now," I reflected ; "and I don't doubt to be able to do it hereafter : if one expedient loses its virtue, another must be devised."

Yet after all my task was not an easy one : often I would rather have pleased than teased

him. My future husband was becoming to me my whole world; and, more than the world: almost my hope of heaven. He stood between me and every thought of religion, as an eclipse intervenes between man and the broad sun. I could not, in those days, see God for his creature: of whom I had made an idol.

CHAPTER X.

THE month of courtship had wasted : its very last hours were being numbered. There was no putting off the day that advanced—the bridal day ; and all preparations for its arrival were complete. *I*, at least, had nothing more to do : there were my trunks, packed, locked, corded, ranged in a row along the wall of my little chamber ; to-morrow, at this time, they would be far on their road to London : and so should I (*D. V.*),—or rather, not *I*, but one Jane Rochester, a person whom as yet I knew not. The cards of address alone remained to nail on : they lay, four little squares, on the drawer. Mr. Rochester had himself written the direction, “Mrs. Rochester, — Hotel, London,” on each : I could not persuade myself to affix them, or to have them affixed. Mrs. Rochester ! She

did not exist: she would not be born till to-morrow, some time after eight o'clock A. M.; and I would wait to be assured she had come into the world alive, before I assigned to her all that property. It was enough that in yonder closet, opposite my dressing-table, garments said to be hers had already displaced my black stuff Lowood frock and straw bonnet: for not to me appertained that suit of wedding raiment; the pearl-coloured robe, the vapoury veil, pendent from the usurped portmanteau. I shut the closet, to conceal the strange, wraith-like apparel it contained; which, at this evening hour—nine o'clock—gave out certainly a most ghostly shimmer through the shadow of my apartment. “I will leave you by yourself, white dream,” I said. “I am feverish: I hear the wind blowing; I will go out of doors and feel it.”

It was not only the hurry of preparation that made me feverish; not only the anticipation of the great change—the new life which was to commence to-morrow: both these circumstances had their share, doubtless, in producing that restless, excited mood which

hurried me forth at this late hour into the darkening grounds; but a third cause influenced my mind more than they.

I had at heart a strange and anxious thought. Something had happened which I could not comprehend; no one knew of or had seen the event but myself: it had taken place the preceding night. Mr. Rochester that night was absent from home; nor was he yet returned: business had called him to a small estate of two or three farms he possessed thirty miles off—business it was requisite he should settle in person, previously to his meditated departure from England. I waited now his return; eager to disburthen my mind, and to seek of him the solution of the enigma that perplexed me. Stay till he comes, reader; and, when I disclose my secret to him, you shall share the confidence.

I sought the orchard: driven to its shelter by the wind, which all day had blown strong and full from the south; without, however, bringing a speck of rain. Instead of subsiding as night drew on, it seemed to augment its rush and deepen its roar: the trees blew

stedfastly one way, never writhing round, and scarcely tossing back their boughs once in an hour; so continuous was the strain bending their branchy heads northward—the clouds drifted from pole to pole, fast following, mass on mass: no glimpse of blue sky had been visible that July day.

It was not without a certain wild pleasure I ran before the wind, delivering my trouble of mind to the measureless air-torrent thundering through space. Descending the laurel-walk, I faced the wreck of the chestnut tree; it stood up, black and riven: the trunk, split down the centre, gaped ghastly. The cloven halves were not broken from each other, for the firm base and strong roots kept them unsundered below; though community of vitality was destroyed—the sap could flow no more: their great boughs on each side were dead, and next winter's tempests would be sure to fell one or both to earth: as yet, however, they might be said to form one tree—a ruin; but an entire ruin.

“You did right to hold fast to each other,” I said: as if the monster-splinters were living

things, and could hear me. "I think, scathed as you look, and charred and scorched, there must be a little sense of life in you yet; rising out of that adhesion at the faithful, honest roots: you will never have green leaves more—never more see birds making nests and singing idyls in your boughs; the time of pleasure and love is over with you; but you are not desolate: each of you has a comrade to sympathize with him in his decay." As I looked up at them, the moon appeared momentarily in that part of the sky which filled their fissure; her disk was blood-red and half overcast: she seemed to throw on me one bewildered, dreary glance, and buried herself again instantly in the deep drift of cloud. The wind fell, for a second, round Thornfield; but far away, over wood and water, poured a wild, melancholy wail: it was sad to listen to, and I ran off again.

Here and there I strayed through the orchard, gathering up the apples with which the grass round the tree roots was thickly strown: then I employed myself in dividing the ripe from the unripe; I carried them into the house

and put them away in the store-room. Then I repaired to the library to ascertain whether the fire was lit; for, though summer, I knew, on such a gloomy evening, Mr. Rochester would like to see a cheerful hearth when he came in: yes, the fire had been kindled some time, and burnt well. I placed his arm-chair by the chimney-corner: I wheeled the table near it: I let down the curtain, and had the candles brought in ready for lighting. More restless than ever, when I had completed these arrangements I could not sit still, nor even remain in the house: a little time-piece in the room and the old clock in the hall simultaneously struck ten.

“How late it grows!” I said: “I will run down to the gates: it is moonlight at intervals; I can see a good way on the road. He may be coming now, and to meet him will save some minutes of suspense.”

The wind roared high in the great trees which embowered the gates; but the road as far as I could see, to the right hand and the left, was all still and solitary: save for the shadows of clouds crossing it at intervals, as the moon

looked out, it was but a long pale line, unvaried by one moving speck.

A puerile tear dimmed my eye while I looked—a tear of disappointment and impatience: ashamed of it, I wiped it away. I lingered; the moon shut herself wholly within her chamber, and drew close her curtain of dense cloud: the night grew dark; rain came driving fast on the gale.

“I wish he would come! I wish he would come!” I exclaimed, seized with hypochondriac foreboding. I had expected his arrival before tea; now it was dark: what could keep him? Had an accident happened? The event of last night again recurred to me. I interpreted it as a warning of disaster. I feared my hopes were too bright to be realized; and I had enjoyed so much bliss lately that I imagined my fortune had passed its meridian, and must now decline.

“Well, I cannot return to the house,” I thought; “I cannot sit by the fireside, while he is abroad in inclement weather: better tire my limbs than strain my heart; I will go forward and meet him.”

I set out; I walked fast, but not far: ere I had measured a quarter of a mile, I heard the tramp of hoofs; a horseman came on, full gallop, a dog ran by his side. Away with evil presentiment! It was he: here he was, mounted on Mesrour, followed by Pilot. He saw me; for the moon had opened a blue field in the sky, and rode in it watery bright: he took his hat off and waved it round his head. I now ran to meet him.

“There!” he exclaimed, as he stretched out his hand and bent from the saddle: “You can’t do without me, that is evident. Step on my boot-toe; give me both hands: mount!”

I obeyed; joy made me agile: I sprang up before him. A hearty kissing I got for a welcome: and some boastful triumph; which I swallowed as well as I could. He checked himself in his exultation to demand, “But is there anything the matter, Janet, that you come to meet me at such an hour? Is there anything wrong?”

“No; but I thought you would never come.

I could not bear to wait in the house for you : especially with this rain and wind."

"Rain and wind indeed! Yes, you are dripping like a mermaid; pull my cloak round you : but I think you are feverish, Jane; both your cheek and hand are burning hot. I ask again, is there anything the matter?"

"Nothing, now : I am neither afraid nor unhappy."

"Then you have been both?"

"Rather : but I'll tell you all about it by-and-by, sir ; and I daresay you will only laugh at me for my pains."

"I'll laugh at you heartily when to-morrow is past ; till then I dare not : my prize is not certain. This is you ; who have been as slippery as an eel this last month, and as thorny as a briar-rose ? I could not lay a finger anywhere but I was pricked ; and now I seem to have gathered up a stray lamb in my arms : you wandered out of the fold to seek your shepherd, did you, Jane ?"

"I wanted you : but don't boast. Here we are at Thornfield : now let me get down."

He landed me on the pavement. As John

took his horse, and he followed me into the hall, he told me to make haste and put something dry on, and then to return to him in the library; and he stopped me, as I made for the staircase, to extort a promise that I would not be long: nor was I long; in five minutes I rejoined him. I found him at supper.

“Take a seat, and bear me company, Jane: please God, it is the last meal but one you will eat at Thornfield Hall for a long time.”

I sat down near him; but told him I could not eat.

“Is it because you have the prospect of a journey before you, Jane? Is it the thoughts of going to London that takes away your appetite?”

“I cannot see my prospects clearly tonight, sir; and I hardly know what thoughts I have in my head. Everything in life seems unreal.”

“Except me: I am substantial enough:—touch me.”

“You, sir, are the most phantom-like of all: you are a mere dream.”

He held out his hand, laughing: “Is that a

dream?" said he, placing it close to my eyes. He had a rounded, muscular, and vigorous hand, as well as a long, strong arm.

"Yes; though I touch it, it is a dream," said I, as I put it down from before my face.

"Sir, have you finished supper?"

"Yes, Jane."

I rang the bell, and ordered away the tray. When we were again alone, I stirred the fire, and then took a low seat at my master's knee.

"It is near midnight," I said.

"Yes: but remember, Jane, you promised to wake with me the night before my wedding."

"I did; and I will keep my promise, for an hour or two at least: I have no wish to go to bed."

"Are all your arrangements complete?"

"All, sir."

"And on my part, likewise," he returned. "I have settled everything; and we shall leave Thornfield to-morrow, within half an hour after our return from church."

"Very well, sir."

"With what an extraordinary smile you

uttered that word,—‘very well,’ Jane! What a bright spot of colour you have on each cheek! and how strangely your eyes glitter! Are you well?”

“I believe I am.”

“Believe! What is the matter?—Tell me what you feel.”

“I could not, sir: no words could tell you what I feel. I wish this present hour would never end: who knows with what fate the next may come charged?”

“This is hypochondria, Jane. You have been over excited, or over fatigued.”

“Do you, sir, feel calm and happy?”

“Calm?—no: but happy,—to the heart’s core.”

I looked up at him to read the signs of bliss in his face: it was ardent and flushed.

“Give me your confidence, Jane,” he said: “relieve your mind of any weight that oppresses it, by imparting it to me. What do you fear?—that I shall not prove a good husband?”

“It is the idea farthest from my thoughts.”

“Are you apprehensive of the new sphere you are about to enter?—of the new life into which you are passing?”

“No.”

“You puzzle me, Jane: your look and tone of sorrowful audacity perplex and pain me. I want an explanation.”

“Then, sir,—listen. You were from home last night?”

“I was: I know that; and you hinted a while ago at something which had happened in my absence:—nothing, probably, of consequence; but, in short, it has disturbed you. Let me hear it. Mrs. Fairfax has said something, perhaps? or you have overheard the servants talk?—your sensitive self-respect has been wounded?”

“No, sir.” It struck twelve—I waited till the time-piece had concluded its silver chime, and the clock its hoarse, vibrating stroke, and then I proceeded.

“All day, yesterday, I was very busy, and very happy in my ceaseless bustle; for I am not, as you seem to think, troubled by any haunting fears about the new sphere, et cetera: I think it a glorious thing to have the hope of living with you, because I love you.—No, sir, don't caress me now—let me talk undis-

turbed. Yesterday I trusted well in Providence, and believed that events were working together for your good and mine: it was a fine day, if you recollect—the calmness of the air and sky forbade apprehensions respecting your safety or comfort on your journey. I walked a little while on the pavement after tea, thinking of you; and I beheld you in imagination so near me, I scarcely missed your actual presence. I thought of the life that lay before me—*your* life, sir—an existence more expansive and stirring than my own: as much more so as the depths of the sea to which the brook runs, are than the shallows of its own strait channel. I wondered why moralists call this world a dreary wilderness: for me it blossomed like a rose. Just at sunset, the air turned cold and the sky cloudy: I went in. Sophie called me up stairs to look at my wedding-dress, which they had just brought; and under it in the box I found your present,—the veil which, in your princely extravagance, you sent for from London: resolved, I suppose, since I would not have jewels, to cheat me into accepting something as costly. I smiled as I

unfolded it, and devised how I would tease you about your aristocratic tastes, and your efforts to masque your plebeian bride in the attributes of a peeress. I thought how I would carry down to you the square of unembroidered blonde I had myself prepared as a covering for my low-born head, and ask if that was not good enough for a woman who could bring her husband neither fortune, beauty, nor connections. I saw plainly how you would look; and heard your impetuous republican answers, and your haughty disavowal of any necessity on your part to augment your wealth, or elevate your standing, by marrying either a purse or a coronet."

"How well you read me, you witch!" interposed Mr. Rochester: "but what did you find in the veil besides its embroidery? Did you find poison, or a dagger, that you look so mournful now?"

"No, no, sir; besides the delicacy and richness of the fabric, I found nothing save Fairfax Rochester's pride; and that did not scare me, because I am used to the sight of the demon. But, sir, as it grew dark, the wind

rose : it blew yesterday evening, not as it blows now—wild and high—but “with a sullen, moaning sound” far more eerie. I wished you were at home. I came into this room, and the sight of the empty chair and fireless hearth chilled me. For some time after I went to bed, I could not sleep—a sense of anxious excitement distressed me. The gale still rising, seemed to my ear to muffle a mournful undersound ; whether in the house or abroad I could not at first tell, but it recurred, doubtful yet doleful at every lull : at last I made out it must be some dog howling at a distance. I was glad when it ceased. On sleeping, I continued in dreams the idea of a dark and gusty night. I continued also the wish to be with you, and experienced a strange, regretful consciousness of some barrier dividing us. During all my first sleep, I was following the windings of an unknown road ; total obscurity environed me ; rain pelted me ; I was burdened with the charge of a little child : a very small creature, too young and feeble to walk, and which shivered in my cold arms, and wailed piteously in my ear. I thought, sir, that you were on the road a long

way before me; and I strained every nerve to overtake you, and made effort on effort to utter your name and entreat you to stop—but my movements were fettered; and my voice still died away inarticulate; while you, I felt, withdrew farther and farther every moment.”

“And these dreams weigh on your spirits now, Jane, when I am close to you? Little nervous subject! Forget visionary woe, and think only of real happiness! You say you love me, Janet: yes—I will not forget that; and you cannot deny it. *Those* words did not die inarticulate on your lips. I heard them clear and soft: a thought too solemn perhaps, but sweet as music—‘I think it is a glorious thing to have the hope of living with you, Edward, because I love you.’—Do you love me, Jane? repeat it.”

“I do, sir—I do, with my whole heart.”

“Well,” he said, after some minutes silence, “it is strange: but that sentence has penetrated my breast painfully. Why? I think because you said it with such an earnest, religious energy; and because your upward gaze

at me now is the very sublime of faith, truth, and devotion : it is too much as if some spirit were near me. Look wicked, Jane ; as you know well how to look ; coin one of your wild, sly, provoking smiles ; tell me you hate me—tease me, vex me ; do anything but move me : I would rather be incensed than saddened.”

“ I will tease you and vex you to your heart’s content, when I have finished my tale : but hear me to the end.”

“ I thought, Jane, you had told me all. I thought I had found the source of your melancholy in a dream !”

I shook my head. “ What ! is there more ? But I will not believe it to be anything important. I warn you of incredulity beforehand. Go on.”

The disquietude of his air, the somewhat apprehensive impatience of his manner, surprised me : but I proceeded.

“ I dreamt another dream, sir : that Thornfield Hall was a dreary ruin, the retreat of bats and owls. I thought that of all the stately front nothing remained but a shell-like

wall, very high and very fragile looking. I wandered, on a moonlight night, through the grass-grown enclosure within: here I stumbled over a marble hearth, and there over a fallen fragment of cornice. Wrapped up in a shawl, I still carried the unknown little child: I might not lay it down anywhere, however tired were my arms—however much its weight impeded my progress, I must retain it. I heard the gallop of a horse at a distance on the road: I was sure it was you; and you were departing for many years, and for a distant country. I climbed the thin wall with frantic perilous haste, eager to catch one glimpse of you from the top: the stones rolled from under my feet, the ivy branches I grasped gave way, the child clung round my neck in terror, and almost strangled me: at last I gained the summit. I saw you like a speck on a white track, lessening every moment. The blast blew so strong I could not stand. I sat down on the narrow ledge; I hushed the scared infant in my lap: you turned an angle of the road; I bent forward to take a last

look ; the wall crumbled ; I was shaken ; the child rolled from my knee ; I lost my balance, fell, and woke."

" Now, Jane, that is all."

" All the preface, sir ; the tale is yet to come. On waking, a gleam dazzled my eyes : I thought—oh, it is daylight ! But I was mistaken : it was only candle-light. Sophie, I supposed, had come in. There was a light on the dressing-table, and the door of the closet, where, before going to bed, I had hung my wedding dress and veil, stood open : I heard a rustling there. I asked, ' Sophie, what are you doing ? ' No one answered : but a form emerged from the closet : it took the light, held it aloft and surveyed the garments pendant from the portmanteau. ' Sophie ! Sophie ! ' I again cried : and still it was silent. I had risen up in bed, I bent forward : first, surprise, then bewilderment, came over me ; and then my blood crept cold through my veins. Mr. Rochester, this was not Sophie, it was not Leah, it was not Mrs. Fairfax : it was not—no, I was sure of it, and am still—it

was not even that strange woman, Grace Poole."

"It must have been one of them," interrupted my master.

"No, sir, I solemnly assure you to the contrary. The shape standing before me had never crossed my eyes within the precincts of Thornfield Hall before: the height, the contour were new to me."

"Describe it, Jane."

"It seemed, sir, a woman, tall and large, with thick and dark hair hanging long down her back. I know not what dress she had on: it was white and straight; but whether gown, sheet, or shroud, I cannot tell."

"Did you see her face?"

"Not at first. But presently she took my veil from its place; she held it up, gazed at it long, and then she threw it over her own head, and turned to the mirror. At that moment I saw the reflection of the visage and features quite distinctly in the dark oblong glass."

"And how were they?"

"Fearful and ghastly to me—oh, sir, I never

saw a face like it! It was a discoloured face—it was a savage face. I wish I could forget the roll of the red eyes and the fearful blackened inflation of the lineaments!”

“Ghosts are usually pale, Jane.”

“This, sir, was purple : the lips were swelled and dark ; the brow furrowed ; the black eyebrows widely raised over the blood-shot eyes. Shall I tell you of what it reminded me?”

“You may.”

“Of the foul German spectre—the Vampire.”

“Ah!—What did it do?”

“Sir, it removed my veil from its gaunt head, rent it in two parts, and flinging both on the floor, trampled on them.”

“Afterwards?”

“It drew aside the window-curtain and looked out : perhaps it saw dawn approaching, for, taking the candle, it retreated to the door. Just at my bedside, the figure stopped : the fiery eye glared upon me—she thrust up her candle close to my face, and extinguished it under my eyes. I was aware her wild visage

flamed over mine, and I lost consciousness : for the second time in my life—only the second time—I became insensible from terror.”

“ Who was with you when you revived ? ”

“ No one, sir ; but the broad day. I rose, bathed my head and face in water, drank a long draught ; felt that though enfeebled I was not ill, and determined that to none but you would I impart this vision. Now, sir, tell me who and what that woman was ? ”

“ The creature of an over-stimulated brain ; that is certain. I must be careful of you, my treasure : nerves like yours were not made for rough handling.”

“ Sir, depend on it, my nerves were not in fault ; the thing was real : the transaction actually took place.”

“ And your previous dreams : were they real too ? Is Thornfield Hall a ruin ? Am I severed from you by insuperable obstacles ? Am I leaving you without a tear—without a kiss—without a word ? ”

“ Not yet.”

“ Am I about to do it ?—Why the day is

already commenced which is to bind us indissolubly ; and when we are once united, there shall be no recurrence of these mental terrors : I guarantee that.”

“Mental terrors, sir ! I wish I could believe them to be only such : I wish it more now than ever ; since even you cannot explain to me the mystery of that awful visitant.”

“And since I cannot do it, Jane, it must have been unreal.”

“But, sir, when I said so to myself on rising this morning, and when I looked round the room to gather courage and comfort from the cheerful aspect of each familiar object in full daylight—there, on the carpet—I saw what gave the distinct lie to my hypothesis,—the veil, torn from top to bottom in two halves !”

I felt Mr. Rochester start and shudder ; he hastily flung his arms round me : “Thank God !” he exclaimed, “that if anything malignant did come near you last night, it was only the veil that was harmed.—Oh, to think what might have happened !”

He drew his breath short, and strained

me so close to him I could scarcely pant. After some minutes' silence, he continued, cheerily:—

“ Now, Janet, I'll explain to you all about it. It was half dream, half reality: a woman did, I doubt not, enter your room; and that woman was—must have been—Grace Poole. You call her a strange being yourself: from all you know, you have reason so to call her—what did she do to me? what to Mason? In a state between sleeping and waking, you noticed her entrance and her actions; but feverish, almost delirious as you were, you ascribed to her a goblin appearance different from her own: the long dishevelled hair, the swelled black face, the exaggerated stature, were figments of imagination, results of nightmare; the spiteful tearing of the veil was real: and it is like her. I see you would ask why I keep such a woman in my house: when we have been married a year and a day, I will tell you; but not now. Are you satisfied, Jane? Do you accept my solution of the mystery?”

I reflected, and in truth it appeared to me

the only possible one: satisfied I was not, but to please him I endeavoured to appear so—relieved, I certainly did feel; so I answered him with a contented smile. And now, as it was long past one, I prepared to leave him.

“Does not Sophie sleep with Adèle in the nursery?” he asked, as I lit my candle.

“Yes, sir.”

“And there is room enough in Adèle’s little bed for you. You must share it with her to-night, Jane: it is no wonder that the incident you have related should make you nervous, and I would rather you did not sleep alone: promise me to go to the nursery.”

“I shall be very glad to do so, sir.”

“And fasten the door securely on the inside. Wake Sophie when you go up stairs, under pretence of requesting her to rouse you in good time to-morrow; for you must be dressed and have finished breakfast before eight. And now, no more sombre thoughts: chase dull care away, Janet. Don’t you hear to what soft whispers the wind has fallen? and there is no more beating of rain against the

window-panes : look here—(he lifted up the curtain) it is a lovely night !”

It was. Half heaven was pure and stainless : the clouds, now trooping before the wind, which had shifted to the west, were filing off eastward in long, silvered columns. The moon shone peacefully.

“ Well,” said Mr. Rochester, gazing inquiringly into my eyes, “ how is my Janet now ?”

“ The night is serene, sir ; and so am I.”

“ And you will not dream of separation and sorrow to-night ; but of happy love and blissful union.”

This prediction was but half fulfilled : I did not indeed dream of sorrow, but as little did I dream of joy ; for I never slept at all. With little Adèle in my arms, I watched the slumber of childhood—so tranquil, so passionless, so innocent—and waited for the coming day : all my life was awake and astir in my frame ; and as soon as the sun rose, I rose too. I remember Adèle clung to me as I left her : I remember I kissed her as I loosened her little

hands from my neck ; and I cried over her with strange emotion, and quitted her because I feared my sobs would break her still sound repose. She seemed the emblem of my past life ; and he, I was now to array myself to meet, the dread, but adored, type of my unknown future day.

CHAPTER XI.

SOPHIE came at seven to dress me; she was very long indeed in accomplishing her task : so long that Mr. Rochester, grown, I suppose, impatient of my delay, sent up to ask why I did not come. She was just fastening my veil (the plain square of blond after all) to my hair with a brooch ; I hurried from under her hands as soon as I could.

“ Stop !” she cried in French. “ Look at yourself in the mirror : you have not taken one peep.”

So I turned at the door : I saw a robed and veiled figure, so unlike my usual self that it seemed almost the image of a stranger. “ Jane !” called a voice, and I hastened down. I was received at the foot of the stairs by Mr. Rochester.

“Lingerer,” he said, “my brain is on fire with impatience; and you tarry so long!”

He took me into the dining-room, surveyed me keenly all over, pronounced me “fair as a lily, and not only the pride of his life, but the desire of his eyes,” and then telling me he would give me but ten minutes to eat some breakfast, he rang the bell. One of his lately hired servants, a footman, answered it.

“Is John getting the carriage ready?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Is the luggage brought down?”

“They are bringing it down now, sir.”

“Go you to the church: see if Mr. Wood (the clergyman) and the clerk are there: return and tell me.”

The church, as the reader knows, was but just beyond the gates; the footman soon returned.

“Mr. Wood is in the vestry, sir, putting on his surplice.”

“And the carriage?”

“The horses are harnessing.”

“We shall not want it to go to church; but it must be ready the moment we return: all

the boxes and luggage arranged and strapped on, and the coachman in his seat."

"Yes, sir."

"Jane, are you ready?"

I rose. There were no groomsmen, no bridesmaids, no relatives to wait for or marshal: none but Mr. Rochester and I. Mrs. Fairfax stood in the hall as we passed. I would fain have spoken to her, but my hand was held by a grasp of iron: I was hurried along by a stride I could hardly follow; and to look at Mr. Rochester's face was to feel that not a second of delay would be tolerated for any purpose. I wonder what other bridegroom ever looked as he did—so bent up to a purpose, so grimly resolute; or who, under such steadfast brows, ever revealed such flaming and flashing eyes.

I know not whether the day was fair or foul; in descending the drive, I gazed neither on sky nor earth: my heart was with my eyes; and both seemed migrated into Mr. Rochester's frame. I wanted to see the invisible thing on which, as we went along, he appeared to fasten a glance fierce and fell. I wanted to feel the

thoughts whose force he seemed breasting and resisting.

At the churchyard wicket he stopped : he discovered I was quite out of breath. " Am I cruel in my love ? " he said. " Delay an instant : lean on me, Jane. "

And now I can recall the picture of the gray old house of God rising calm before me, of a rook wheeling round the steeple, of a ruddy morning sky beyond. I remember something, too, of the green grave-mounds ; and I have not forgotten, either, two figures of strangers, straying amongst the low hillocks, and reading the mementoes graven on the few mossy head-stones. I noticed them, because, as they saw us, they passed round to the back of the church ; and I doubted not they were going to enter by the side-aisle door, and witness the ceremony. By Mr. Rochester they were not observed ; he was earnestly looking at my face, from which the blood had, I daresay, momentarily fled : for I felt my forehead dewy, and my cheeks and lips cold. When I rallied, which I soon did, he walked gently with me up the path to the porch.

We entered the quiet and humble temple ; the priest waited in his white surplice at the lowly altar, the clerk beside him. All was still : two shadows only moved in a remote corner. My conjecture had been correct : the strangers had slipped in before us, and they now stood by the vault of the Rochesters, their backs towards us, viewing through the rails the old, time-stained marble tomb, where a kneeling angel guarded the remains of Damer de Rochester, slain at Marston Moor in the time of the civil wars ; and of Elizabeth, his wife.

Our place was taken at the communion-rails. Hearing a cautious step behind me, I glanced over my shoulder : one of the strangers—a gentleman, evidently—was advancing up the chancel. The service began. The explanation of the intent of matrimony was gone through ; and then the clergyman came a step further forward, and bending slightly towards Mr. Rochester, went on.

“ I require and charge you both (as ye will answer at the dreadful day of judgment, when, the secrets of all hearts shall be disclosed)

that if either of you know any impediment why ye may not lawfully be joined together in matrimony, ye do now confess it; for be ye well assured that so many as are coupled together otherwise than God's Word doth allow, are not joined together by God, neither is their matrimony lawful."

He paused, as the custom is. When is the pause after that sentence ever broken by reply? Not, perhaps, once in a hundred years. And the clergyman, who had not lifted his eyes from his book, and had held his breath but for a moment, was proceeding: his hand was already stretched towards Mr. Rochester, as his lips unclosed to ask, "Wilt thou have this woman for thy wedded wife?"—when a distinct and near voice said:—

"The marriage cannot go on: I declare the existence of an impediment."

The clergyman looked up at the speaker, and stood mute; the clerk did the same; Mr. Rochester moved slightly, as if an earthquake had rolled under his feet: taking a firmer footing, and not turning his head or eyes, he said, "Proceed."

Profound silence fell when he had uttered that word, with deep but low intonation. Presently Mr. Wood said :—

“ I cannot proceed without some investigation into what has been asserted, and evidence of its truth or falsehood.”

“ The ceremony is quite broken off,” subjoined the voice behind us. “ I am in a condition to prove my allegation : an insuperable impediment to this marriage exists.”

Mr. Rochester heard, but heeded not : he stood stubborn and rigid : making no movement, but to possess himself of my hand. What a hot and strong grasp he had !—and how like quarried marble was his pale, firm, massive front at this moment ! How his eyes shone, still, watchful, and yet wild beneath !

Mr. Wood seemed at a loss. “ What is the nature of the impediment ?” he asked. “ Perhaps it may be got over — explained away ?”

“ Hardly,” was the answer : “ I have called it insuperable, and I speak advisedly.”

The speaker came forwards, and leaned on

the rails. He continued, uttering each word distinctly, calmly, steadily, but not loudly.

“It simply consists in the existence of a previous marriage: Mr. Rochester has a wife now living.”

My nerves vibrated to these low-spoken words as they had never vibrated to thunder—my blood felt their subtle violence as it had never felt frost or fire: but I was collected, and in no danger of swooning. I looked at Mr. Rochester: I made him look at me. His whole face was colourless rock: his eye was both spark and flint. He disavowed nothing: he seemed as if he would defy all things. Without speaking; without smiling; without seeming to recognise in me a human being, he only twined my waist with his arm, and riveted me to his side.

“Who are you?” he asked of the intruder.

“My name is Briggs—a solicitor of —— street, London.”

“And you would thrust on me a wife?”

“I would remind you of your lady’s existence, sir: which the law recognises, if you do not.”

“Favour me with an account of her—with her name, her parentage, her place of abode.”

“Certainly.” Mr. Briggs calmly took a paper from his pocket, and read out in a sort of official, nasal voice:—

“I affirm and can prove that on the 20th of October, A.D. —, (a date of fifteen years back) Edward Fairfax Rochester of Thornfield Hall, in the county of —, and of Ferndean Manor, in —shire, England, was married to my sister, Bertha Antoinetta Mason, daughter of Jonas Mason, merchant, and of Antoinetta his wife, a Creole—at — church, Spanish-town, Jamaica. The record of the marriage will be found in the register of that church—a copy of it is now in my possession. Signed, Richard Mason.’”

“That—if a genuine document—may prove I have been married, but it does not prove that the woman mentioned therein as my wife is still living.”

“She was living three months ago,” returned the lawyer.

“How do you know?”

“ I have a witness to the fact ; whose testimony even you, sir, will scarcely controvert.”

“ Produce him—or go to hell.”

“ I will produce him first—he is on the spot : Mr. Mason, have the goodness to step forward.”

Mr. Rochester on hearing the name set his teeth ; he experienced, too, a sort of strong convulsive quiver : near to him as I was, I felt the spasmodic movement of fury or despair run through his frame. The second stranger, who had hitherto lingered in the background, now drew near ; a pale face looked over the solicitor’s shoulder—yes, it was Mason himself. Mr. Rochester turned and glared at him. His eye, as I have often said, was a black eye : it had now a tawny, nay a bloody light in its gloom ; and his face flushed—olive cheek and hueless forehead received a glow, as from spreading, ascending heart-fire ; and he stirred, lifted his strong arm—he could have struck Mason—dashed him on the church-floor—shocked by ruthless blow the breath from his body—but Mason shrank away, and cried faintly, “ Good God ! ” Contempt fell cool on

Mr. Rochester—his passion died as if a blight had shrivelled it up: he only asked, “What have *you* to say?”

An inaudible reply escaped Mason’s white lips.

“The devil is in it if you cannot answer distinctly. I again demand, what have *you* to say?”

“Sir—sir—” interrupted the clergyman, “do not forget you are in a sacred place.” Then addressing Mason, he inquired gently, “Are you aware, sir, whether or not this gentleman’s wife is still living?”

“Courage,” urged the lawyer,—“speak out.”

“She is now living at Thornfield Hall;” said Mason, in more articulate tones: “I saw her there last April. I am her brother.”

“At Thornfield Hall!” ejaculated the clergyman. “Impossible! I am an old resident in this neighbourhood, sir, and I never heard of a Mrs. Rochester at Thornfield Hall.”

I saw a grim smile contort Mr. Rochester’s lip and he muttered:—

“No—by God! I took care that none should hear of it—or of her under that name.” He

mused—for ten minutes he held counsel with himself: he formed his resolve, and announced it:—

“ Enough—all shall bolt out at once, like the bullet from the barrel.—Wood, close your book and take off your surplice; John Green, (to the clerk) leave the church: there will be no wedding to-day:” the man obeyed.

Mr. Rochester continued, hardily and recklessly: “ Bigamy is an ugly word!—I meant, however, to be a bigamist: but fate has out-manceuvred me; or Providence has checked me,—perhaps the last. I am little better than a devil at this moment; and, as my pastor there would tell me, deserve no doubt the sternest judgments of God,—even to the quenchless fire and deathless worm. Gentlemen, my plan is broken up!—what this lawyer and his client say is true: I have been married; and the woman to whom I was married lives! You say you never heard of a Mrs. Rochester at the house up yonder, Wood: but I daresay you have many a time inclined your ear to gossip about the mysterious lunatic kept there under watch and ward. Some

have whispered to you that she is my bastard half-sister ; some, my cast-off mistress ;—I now inform you that she is my wife, whom I married fifteen years ago, — Bertha Mason by name ; sister of this resolute personage, who is now, with his quivering limbs and white cheeks, showing you what a stout heart men may bear. Cheer up, Dick !—never fear me !—I'd almost as soon strike a woman as you. Bertha Mason is mad ; and she came of a mad family : —idiots and maniacs through three generations ! Her mother, the Creole, was both a mad woman and a drunkard !—as I found out after I had wed the daughter : for they were silent on family secrets before. Bertha, like a dutiful child, copied her parent in both points. I had a charming partner—pure, wise, modest : you can fancy that I was a happy man.—I went through rich scenes ! Oh ! my experience has been heavenly, if you only knew it ! But I owe you no further explanation. Briggs, Wood, Mason,—I invite you all to come up to the house and visit Mrs. Poole's patient, and *my wife* !—You shall see what sort of a being I was cheated into espousing, and judge whether

or not I had a right to break the compact, and seek sympathy with something at least human. This girl," he continued, looking at me, "knew no more than you, Wood, of the disgusting secret: she thought all was fair and legal; and never dreamt she was going to be entrapped into a feigned union with a defrauded wretch, already bound to a bad, mad, and embruted partner! Come, all of you, follow!"

Still holding me fast, he left the church: the three gentlemen came after. At the front door of the hall we found the carriage.

"Take it back to the coach-house, John," said Mr. Rochester, coolly; "it will not be wanted to-day."

At our entrance, Mrs. Fairfax, Adèle, Sophie, Leah, advanced to meet and greet us.

"To the right about—every soul!" cried the master: "away with your congratulations! Who wants them?—Not I!—they are fifteen years too late!"

He passed on and ascended the stairs, still holding my hand, and still beckoning the gentlemen to follow him; which they did. We mounted the first staircase, passed up the

gallery, proceeded to the third story: the low, black door, opened by Mr. Rochester's master key, admitted us to the tapestried room, with its great bed, and its pictorial cabinet.

"You know this place, Mason," said our guide; "she bit and stabbed you here."

He lifted the hangings from the wall, uncovering the second door: this, too, he opened. In a room without a window, there burnt a fire, guarded by a high and strong fender, and a lamp suspended from the ceiling by a chain. Grace Poole bent over the fire, apparently cooking something in a saucepan. In the deep shade, at the further end of the room, a figure ran backwards and forwards. What it was, whether beast or human being, one could not, at first sight, tell: it grovelled, seemingly, on all fours; it snatched and growled like some strange wild animal: but it was covered with clothing; and a quantity of dark, grizzled hair, wild as a mane, hid its head and face.

"Good-morrow, Mrs. Poole!" said Mr. Rochester. "How are you? and how is your charge to-day?"

"We're tolerable, sir, I thank you," replied

Grace, lifting the boiling mess carefully on to the hob: "rather snappish, but not 'rageous."

A fierce cry seemed to give the lie to her favourable report: the clothed hyena rose up, and stood tall on its hind feet.

"Ah, sir, she sees you!" exclaimed Grace: "you 'd better not stay."

"Only a few moments, Grace: you must allow me a few moments."

"Take care then, sir!—for God's sake, take care!"

The maniac bellowed: she parted her shaggy locks from her visage, and gazed wildly at her visitors. I recognised well that purple face,—those bloated features. Mrs. Poole advanced.

"Keep out of the way," said Mr. Rochester, thrusting her aside: "she has no knife now, I suppose? and I'm on my guard."

"One never knows what she has, sir; she is so cunning: it is not in mortal discretion to fathom her craft."

"We had better leave her," whispered Mason.

"Go to the devil!" was his brother-in-law's recommendation.

“Ware!” cried Grace. The three gentlemen retreated simultaneously. Mr. Rochester flung me behind him; the lunatic sprang and grappled his throat viciously, and laid her teeth to his cheek: they struggled. She was a big woman, in stature almost equalling her husband, and corpulent besides: she showed virile force in the contest—more than once she almost throttled him, athletic as he was. He could have settled her with a well-planted blow; but he would not strike: he would only wrestle. At last he mastered her arms; Grace Poole gave him a cord, and he pinioned them behind her: with more rope, which was at hand, he bound her to a chair. The operation was performed amidst the fiercest yells, and the most convulsive plunges. Mr. Rochester then turned to the spectators: he looked at them with a smile both acrid and desolate.

“That is *my wife*,” said he. “Such is the sole conjugal embrace I am ever to know—such are the endearments which are to solace my leisure hours! And *this* is what I wished to have (laying his hand on my shoulder):

this young girl, who stands so grave and quiet at the mouth of hell, looking collectedly at the gambols of a demon. I wanted her just as a change after that fierce ragout. Wood and Briggs, look at the difference! Compare these clear eyes with the red balls yonder—this face with that mask—this form with that bulk; then judge me, priest of the Gospel and man of the law, and remember, with what judgment ye judge ye shall be judged! Off with you now. I must shut up my prize.”

We all withdrew. Mr. Rochester stayed a moment behind us, to give some further order to Grace Poole. The solicitor addressed me as we descended the stair.

“ You, madam,” said he, “ are cleared from all blame: your uncle will be glad to hear it—if, indeed, he should be still living—when Mr. Mason returns to Madeira.”

“ My uncle! What of him? Do you know him?”

“ Mr. Mason does: Mr. Eyre has been the Funchal correspondent of his house for some years. When your uncle received your letter intimating the contemplated union be-

tween yourself and Mr. Rochester, Mr. Mason, who was staying at Madeira to recruit his health, on his way back to Jamaica, happened to be with him. Mr. Eyre mentioned the intelligence; for he knew that my client here was acquainted with a gentleman of the name of Rochester. Mr. Mason, astonished and distressed, as you may suppose, revealed the real state of matters. Your uncle, I am sorry to say, is now on a sickbed; from which, considering the nature of his disease—decline—and the stage it has reached, it is unlikely he will ever rise. He could not then hasten to England himself, to extricate you from the snare into which you had fallen, but he implored Mr. Mason to use no time in taking steps to prevent the false marriage. He referred him to me for assistance. I used all despatch, and am thankful I was not too late: as you, doubtless, must be also. Were I not morally certain that your uncle will be dead ere you reach Madeira, I would advise you to accompany Mr. Mason back: but as it is, I think you had better remain in England till you can hear further, either from or of Mr.

Eyre. Have we anything else to stay for?" he inquired of Mr. Mason.

"No, no—let us be gone," was the anxious reply; and without waiting to take leave of Mr. Rochester, they made their exit at the hall door. The clergyman stayed to exchange a few sentences, either of admonition or reproof, with his haughty parishioner: this duty done, he too departed.

I heard him go as I stood at the half open door of my own room, to which I had now withdrawn. The house cleared, I shut myself in, fastened the bolt that none might intrude, and proceeded—not to weep, not to mourn, I was yet too calm for that, but—mechanically to take off the wedding dress, and replace it by the stuff gown I had worn yesterday, as I thought, for the last time. I then sat down: I felt weak and tired. I leaned my arms on a table, and my head dropped on them. And now I thought: till now I had only heard, seen, moved—followed up and down where I was led or dragged—watched event rush on event, disclosure open beyond disclosure: but *now, I thought.*

The morning had been a quiet morning enough—all except the brief scene with the lunatic : the transaction in the church had not been noisy ; there was no explosion of passion, no loud altercation, no dispute, no defiance or challenge, no tears, no sobs : a few words had been spoken, a calmly pronounced objection to the marriage made ; some stern, short questions put by Mr. Rochester ; answers, explanations given, evidence adduced ; an open admission of the truth had been uttered by my master ; then the living proof had been seen ; the intruders were gone, and all was over.

I was in my own room as usual—just myself, without obvious change : nothing had smitten me, or scathed me, or maimed me. And yet, where was the Jane Eyre of yesterday ?—where was her life ?—where were her prospects ?

Jane Eyre, who had been an ardent, expectant woman—almost a bride—was a cold, solitary girl again : her life was pale ; her prospects were desolate. A Christmas frost had come at midsummer : a white December storm had whirled over June ; ice glazed the ripe apples, drifts crushed the blowing roses ; on

hay-field and corn-field lay a frozen shroud : lanes which last night blushed full of flowers, to-day were pathless with untrodden snow ; and the woods, which twelve hours since waved leafy and fragrant as groves between the tropics, now spread, waste, wild, and white as pine-forests in wintry Norway. My hopes were all dead—struck with a subtle doom, such as, in one night, fell on all the first-born in the land of Egypt. I looked on my cherished wishes, yesterday so blooming and glowing ; they lay stark, chill, livid corpses that could never revive. I looked at my love : that feeling which was my master's—which he had created ; it shivered in my heart, like a suffering child in a cold cradle ; sickness and anguish had seized it : it could not seek Mr. Rochester's arms—it could not derive warmth from his breast. Oh, never more could it turn to him ; for faith was blighted—confidence destroyed ! Mr. Rochester was not to me what he had been ; for he was not what I had thought him. I would not ascribe vice to him ; I would not say he had betrayed me : but the attribute of stainless truth was gone

from his idea; and from his presence I must go: *that* I perceived well. When—how—whither, I could not yet discern: but he himself, I doubted not, would hurry me from Thornfield. Real affection, it seemed, he could not have for me; it had been only fitful passion: that was balked; he would want me no more. I should fear even to cross his path now: my view must be hateful to him. Oh, how blind had been my eyes! How weak my conduct!

My eyes were covered and closed: eddying darkness seemed to swim round me, and reflection came in as black and confused a flow. Self-abandoned, relaxed and effortless, I seemed to have laid me down in the dried-up bed of a great river; I heard a flood loosened in remote mountains, and felt the torrent come: to rise I had no will, to flee I had no strength. I lay faint; longing to be dead. One idea only still throbbed life-like within me—a remembrance of God: it begot an unuttered prayer: these words went wandering up and down in my rayless mind, as something that should be whispered; but no energy was found to express them:—

“Be not far from me, for trouble is near: there is none to help.”

It was near: and as I had lifted no petition to heaven to avert it—as I had neither joined my hands, nor bent my knees, nor moved my lips—it came: in full, heavy swing the torrent poured over me. The whole consciousness of my life lorn, my love lost, my hope quenched, my faith death-struck, swayed full and mighty above me in one sullen mass. That bitter hour cannot be described: in truth, “the waters came into my soul; I sank in deep mire: I felt no standing; I came into deep waters; the floods overflowed me.”

END OF VOLUME II.





